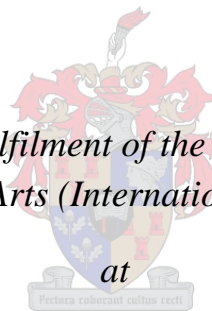


# **THE FOREIGN POLICIES OF MANDELA AND MBEKI: A CLEAR CASE OF IDEALISM VS REALISM ?**

by

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## **Declaration**

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## **Abstract**

After 1994, South African foreign policymakers faced the challenge of reintegrating a country, isolated for many years as a result of the previous government's apartheid policies, into the international system. In the process of transforming South Africa's foreign identity from a pariah state to a respected international player, some commentators contend that presidents Mandela and Mbeki were informed by two contrasting theories of International Relations (IR), namely, idealism and realism, respectively.

In light of the above-stated popular assumptions and interpretations of the foreign policies of Presidents Mandela and Mbeki, this study is motivated by the primary aim to investigate the classification of their foreign policy within the broader framework of IR theory. This is done by sketching a brief overview of the IR theories of idealism, realism and constructivism, followed by an analysis of the foreign policies of these two statesmen in order to identify some of the principles that underpin them. Two case studies – Mandela's response to the 'two Chinas' question and Mbeki's policy of 'quiet diplomacy' towards Zimbabwe – are employed to highlight apparent irregularities with the two leaders' perceived general foreign policy thrusts. It takes the form of a comparative study, and is conducted within the qualitative paradigm, with research based on secondary sources.

The findings show that, although the overarching foreign policy principles of these two former presidents can largely be understood on the basis of particular theoretical approaches, they neither acted consistently according to the assumptions of idealism or realism that are ascribed to them. The conclusion drawn is thus that categorising the foreign policies of presidents Mandela and Mbeki as idealist and realist, respectively, results in a simplistic understanding of the perspectives that inform these two statesmen, as well as the complexity of factors involved in foreign policymaking. More significantly, it is unhelpful in developing a better understanding of South Africa's foreign policy in the post-1994 period.

## Opsomming

Na 1994 het Suid-Afrikaanse buitelandse beleidsmakers die uitdaging in the gesig gestaar om 'n land wat vir baie jare geïsoleer is, as gevolg van die vorige regering se apartheidsbeleid, in die internasionale stelsel te her-integreer. Tydens hierdie proses om Suid-Afrika se buitelandse identiteit van die van 'n muishondstaat na die van 'n aangesiene internasionale speler te transformeer, meen sommige kommentators dat presidente Mandela en Mbeki se buitelandse beleid deur twee teenoorgestelde teorieë van Internasionale Betrekkinge (IB) – naamlik onderskeidelik idealisme en realisme – onderlê is.

In die lig van bogenoemde populêre aannames en interpretasies van die buitelandse beleide van hierdie twee presidente, is hierdie studie gemotiveer deur die primêre doel om die klassifisering van hul buitelandse beleid binne die breë raamwerk van teorieë van IB te ondersoek. Dit word gedoen aan die hand van 'n kort oorsig van die teorieë van idealisme, realisme en konstruktivisme, gevolg deur 'n analise van die buitelandse beleide van hierdie twee staatsleiers, met die doel om die beginsels te identifiseer wat onderliggend daaraan is. Twee gevallestudies – Mandela se reaksie op die 'twee Sjinas' kwessie en Mbeki se 'stille diplomatie' teenoor Zimbabwe – word gebruik om die oënskynlike onreëlmatighede in die twee leiers se algemene buitelandse beleidsrigtings uit te lig. Die studie is vergelykend, en is binne die kwalitatiewe paradigma onderneem, met navorsing grootliks op sekondêre bronne gebaseer.

Die bevindinge wys dat, alhoewel die oorhoofse buitelandse beleidsbeginsels van die twee voormalige presidente grootliks aan die hand van sekere teoretiese benaderings gesien kan word, het nie een konsekwent volgens die aannames van idealisme of realisme, wat aan hulle toegeskryf word, opgetree nie. Die gevolgtrekking is dus dat die klassifisering van die buitelandse beleid van presidente Mandela en Mbeki as onderskeidelik idealisties en realisties, 'n vereenvoudigde begrip van die perspektiewe wat hierdie twee staatsleiers se beleidsvorming onderlê, asook van die komplekse faktore wat by buitelandse beleidsmaking betrokke is, tot gevolg het. Verder help so 'n simplistiese klassifisering ons ook nie om 'n beter begrip van Suid-Afrikaanse beleid in die post-1994 tydperk te ontwikkel nie.

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## List of abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
AU	African Union
BBWG	Big Business Working Group
CIO	Central Intelligence Organisation
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs
DG	Director-General
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
EPG	Eminent Person Group
G8	Group of Eight
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
GNU	Government of National Unity
IGOs	Intergovernmental Organisations
IOs	International Organisations
IMF	International Monetary Found
INGOs	International Non-governmental Organisations
IR	International Relations
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MNCs	Multinational Corporations
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NP	National Party

NPA	National Prosecuting Authority
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
PAC	Pan-Africanist Congress
PCAS	Policy Coordination and Advisory Service
PRC	People's Republic of China
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
ROC	Republic of China
SA	South Africa
SACOB	South African Chamber of Business
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAIC	South African Indian Congress
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
UN	United Nations
US	United States
WTO	World Trade Organisation
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background and Rationale**

Following the first democratic elections, South Africa emerged from decades of international isolation due to its apartheid policies. Being one of the most important African countries in terms of the size of its population and economic strength, South Africa was challenged to construct new democratic institutions and an inclusive civic culture from the bitter legacy of decades of statutory racism and ideological division (Alden and le Pere, 2003:7). The most liberal of constitutions then replaced the narrow hegemony of apartheid, and formed the cornerstone upon which the African National Congress (ANC) leadership attempted to universalise the state and its institutions in conjunction with civil society.

Since 1994, the two first democratically elected presidents have been preoccupied with the construction of a new foreign policy to end many years of international isolation that the country went through (Mills, 1998: 72). In their process of transforming South Africa's foreign identity from a pariah state to an international player, some commentators contend that the foreign policies of presidents Mandela and Mbeki can be analysed according to two contrasting theories of International Relations (IR), namely, idealism and realism, respectively. Under President Mandela, the ANC's driving force was a great moral campaign through which it successfully fought to build a democratic society. Consequently, and without prior experience of governing, the ANC assumed that, having set South Africa to rights, it could make a similar contribution to the world, and so adopted an idealistic approach (Barber, 2005:1096). This hurried conclusion of the country's foreign policy under Mandela having been idealist seems to be based on the

principles<sup>1</sup> that Mandela laid out in 1993, which would give support to South Africa's future foreign policy (Mandela 1993).

Similarly, some critics view South Africa's foreign policy under Mbeki as essentially realist. This conclusion is largely a result of a critical analysis of both the ANC's commitment to political transformation that was proclaimed in 1999 by the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) into the twin objectives of promoting wealth and security, and the government's dedication to becoming a real partner in Africa which is said to have been motivated by the desire to further the national interest. Alden and le Pere (2003:29) note that whilst Mandela advocated the promotion of moral values such as human rights, Mbeki, on the other hand, seemed to privilege material values like economic strength and military capacity.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

In the light of the above-stated popular assumptions and interpretations of South Africa's post-apartheid foreign policy, this study is motivated by the primary objective to find out whether the classification of Mandela and Mbeki as idealist and realist, respectively, is accurate.

## **1.3 Research Aims**

This study will investigate the foreign policies of Mandela and Mbeki and attempt, using two case studies, to show that the classification of them as idealist and realist, respectively, reflects simplistic understandings of the perspectives that inform these two statesmen. This will be done by:

- Firstly, sketching a brief overview of the IR theories of idealism, realism and constructivism;
- Secondly, providing an overview of the foreign policies of these two statesmen in order to identify some of the principles that underpin them, and, using case studies, to explore the theoretical perspectives which we can use to explain their respective foreign policies;

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<sup>1</sup>These included: the centrality of human rights to international relations that will extend beyond the political to include economic, social and environmental dimensions; the promotion of democracy worldwide; the support for justice and the respect for international law as a guide for the relations between nations; the promotion of peace as a goal to which all the nations in the world should strive through agreed non-violent mechanisms.

- Using case studies to highlight apparent irregularities with the perceived general foreign policy thrusts of presidents Mandela and Mbeki and to answer the question whether the two case studies confirm that the classification of their foreign policies is a clear case of idealism versus realism;
- Presenting a conclusion arguing why the classification of Mandela and Mbeki is simplistic and inhibits our understanding of South Africa's foreign policy.

#### **1.4 Research Methodology**

This thesis takes the form of a comparative study, focusing on the similarities and differences between the foreign policies of presidents Mandela and Mbeki. Conducted within the qualitative paradigm, the study is mainly based on secondary sources of information, including books, academic journal articles, publications, newspaper articles, media reports and other relevant literature. The study consists mainly of a critical literature review, where theories of IR are applied to the existing literature and attempts at classification are assessed. Since 1994, South Africa's foreign policy has caught effusive attention in academic writing. The proposed study will thus focus on what has been published on this topic by scholars and researchers, using the case study method, which is justified on the basis that the area to be covered in this analysis is broad. Case study methods involve gathering information about a particular person, social setting, event, or group in order to help the researcher to effectively understand how it operates or functions. Its approach varies significantly from field to field. Given the versatility of the case study method, they may be rather narrow in their focus, or they may take a broad view on life and society (Berg, 1989:212). Researchers have different purposes for studying cases. Three different types of cases can be classified: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective case studies.

- (1) Intrinsic case studies are undertaken when a researcher wants to better understand a particular case not because it represents other cases or because it illustrates some particular trait, characteristic, or problem, but rather because of its very uniqueness or its ordinariness that this case becomes interesting.

- (2) Instrumental case studies are cases examined to provide insight into some issue or to refine some theoretical explanation. In these situations, the case will serve a supportive role, a background against which the actual research interests will play out.
- (3) Collective case studies involve the extensive study of several instrumental cases. Their selection is intended to allow better understanding or perhaps an enhanced ability to theorise about larger collection of cases (Stake, cited in Berg, 1989:216-217).

By using the instrumental case study method, the examination done in this study will be confined to two particular examples, namely the 'two Chinas' question and the so-called 'quiet diplomacy' towards Zimbabwe.

### **1.5 Delimitation and Limitations of the Study**

In terms of timeframe, the study looks only at the period from 1994 until 2008. This period has been chosen for two main reasons. First, Nelson Mandela came in power in 1994 after the first democratic elections. This not only ended the long period of political isolation, but also marked a major milestone on the road to the position that the country now enjoys in the international arena. Second, his successor, Thabo Mbeki, left office in 2008.

Due to the limited period of time available to undertake this study, the scope of this analysis cannot cover everything within the political reigns of these two statesmen. A broader and more comprehensive study with a longer time period for research will improve the quality and depth of the present work.

The study investigates South Africa's foreign policy from 1994 to 2008, and focuses on two case studies, namely: South Africa's response to the 'two Chinas' question and its policy of 'quiet diplomacy' towards Zimbabwe. The choice of the 'two Chinas' question and the crisis in Zimbabwe is motivated by the fact that they constitute examples that diverge from the idealist or realist frame ascribed to Mandela and Mbeki.

Another limitation to the study is the availability and accessibility of information. With regard to the 'two Chinas' question, the study has been limited by language constraints due to the fact that

some literature is only available in Mandarin and Afrikaans. Due to these reasons, only English and French-language sources of information have been used. Moreover, because of the sensitivity of the ongoing crisis in Zimbabwe, South African government publications regarding this matter have been limited.

## **1.6 Literature Review**

The implementation and enforcement of apartheid rules by the National Party in South Africa led to strong criticisms on the part of the international community. Progressively, these criticisms induced the international community to condemn the system of apartheid as contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and the basic norms of international law. Subsequently, the political and economic isolation of the country began in earnest in the 1980s. Coupled with international pressure, this led to a negotiated transition, which culminated in South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, and the inauguration of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela as President of South Africa on 10 May of the same year.

One of the great advantages that the government elected in 1994 had over its forerunner was its collective recognition by the international community. Conscious of the role being played by a number of state members of the international community and the influence that they put into effect to transform the political environment of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, then leader of the ANC, in return declared on the eve of the 1994 presidential elections that human rights, and democratic values and norms would be the light that guides South Africa's future foreign policy (1993:87). According to Alden and le Pere (2003:12), “by incorporating the experiences of the anti-apartheid struggle into the conduct of foreign policy, the ANC leader sought to imbue the practice of international affairs with an orientation towards the promotion of civil liberties and democratisation”.

Mandela's declaration led to the conclusion that under his reign, South Africa's foreign policy was mainly idealist. This point of view is found in a number of newspapers. For example, in an article entitled 'Taking the moral high ground', Alan Sharpe declared that South Africa's foreign policy objectives were to influence world politics through helping to ensure that the world is more secure, peaceful, democratic, humane, equitable, and people-centred. Under Mandela's presidency, human rights became the cornerstone of South Africa's foreign policy.

Sharpe argues that the reason why South Africa pursued these rights internationally, though the country knew that it would not benefit in terms of its own national interests, is that rights not defended are rights easily lost, and rights lost can lead to instability and violence. South Africa whose freedom came largely as a result of moral pressure being applied on the apartheid system felt morally obliged to help secure universal adherence to basic human rights, to help secure that people were not threatened by arbitrary and oppressive rule.

In another article entitled 'President Pragmatic', the author questioned the announcement made by President Nelson Mandela on his South-East Asia tour in 1997 that South Africa's foreign policy would not be influenced by the differences which exist between the internal policies of a particular country with itself. President Nelson Mandela held publicly that countries with a record of human rights violations had been accepted by the United Nations, the Commonwealth and the Non-Aligned Movement. "Why would we let ourselves depart from what international organisations are doing"? He asked. According to the author, this realist view of the world where trade and investment take precedence came as a surprise from a man whose foreign policy had always been driven by idealist principles. By adopting pragmatic foreign policy principles which, as the author comments, are more concerned about prosperity, President Mandela was actually turning his back on principles such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law which, as we will see in the second chapter, are very important to idealist adherents.

In response to critics who condemned President Mandela and his government for having an ambiguous foreign policy, Blade Nzimande<sup>2</sup> insisted that the ANC had an open and transparent approach to international policy based on promoting human rights, peace and democracy<sup>3</sup>. Nzimande's assertion was confirmed by Barber who declares that the approach adopted by the ANC under the leadership of Mandela could broadly be classified as idealism (2004:92).

Taken as a whole, the above suggests that for a great number of observers, South Africa's foreign policy under President Nelson Mandela was essentially idealist. For some others, however, the assumptions stated by President Mandela as South Africa's foreign policy principles and his ambition to promote human rights, peace, democracy and the rule of law worldwide cover a

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<sup>2</sup> At the time member of the ANC national executive committee's international affairs sub-committee.

<sup>3</sup> Blade Nzimande, 'Too many 'straw' Mandelas', published in The Star (SA), 22 March 1996.

number of inconsistencies in the implementation of the new South Africa's foreign policy. Analysing the post-apartheid foreign policy, a number of authors such as Alden and le Pere; Spence; Johnson; Hamill and Kodjo have shown that considering President Nelson Mandela as mostly idealist is misleading. A closer look at South Africa's foreign policy under his presidency reveals a gap between rhetoric and actions. According to these authors, President Nelson Mandela has often acted in a realist manner that is, as we will see later, contrary to the way idealists followers operate.

Alden and le Pere (2003) argue that “in the implementation of foreign policy, financial, commercial, political, and defence interests supplanted the new government's carefully crafted ethical dimension... More than not, they add, this produced realist and pragmatic responses where a critical and principled position might have been more prudent”. As examples to illustrate the gap between the principles and practice of foreign policy under Mandela, Alden and le Pere name the conflict between East Timor and Indonesia; South Africa's relations with Malaysia, China and Taiwan; the Nigeria's political crisis in 1995; the political crisis in Zaire in 1997; the military intervention in Lesotho in 1998; and the controversial arms sales. In all of these cases, Mandela acted in a realist manner, privileging national interests and the use of force.

The question of the principles and practice of South Africa's foreign policy under President Mandela was also raised by Spence, Johnson, and Hamill in Broderick et al. (2001). These three authors provide us with a critical analysis of the government's commitment to human rights. Spence, for example, notes that the major preoccupation of South Africa's foreign policy under Mandela was to weld South Africa's economy into a global marketplace which rewards liberalisation and deregulation and penalises rigidity, inflexibility in the labour market and continued state control over particular assets. According to him, the government elected in 1994 had to face many economic problems inherited from the apartheid system. These included battered sanctions, negative rates of growth, high unemployment and an ever-increasing large burden of public debt. Given that foreign policy begins at home, the new regime had to find ways to create an environment that could help them to further the country's economic interests in order to reverse the situation in which they found themselves. This idea is also shared by Kodjo (1999) who argues that South Africa's desire to cooperate with its neighbours and other African countries was motivated by its desire to further its economic interests. Its president, Nelson



Mandela, became a kind of representative of South African farmers and businessmen in Africa. This hegemonic role seems to be corroborated by Ahwireng-Obeng and McGowan (2001) in their article entitled “*Partner or Hegemon? South Africa in Africa*”.

The government's commitment to issues involving a human rights dimension is also called into question by Johnston. He identifies a big gap between the government's rhetoric and practice. In relation to the crisis in Nigeria, the arms sales to conflict zones, the 'two Chinas' question, the war in Zaire, as well as the land distribution question which has plagued Zimbabwe politics, Johnson attributes the government's failure to the fact that its *Discussion Document on Foreign Policy* (September 1996) raises issues of human rights and democracy with salience, but with neither adequate justification nor an explicit framework for management of such issues in practice.

Hamill, on the other hand, sheds some light on South African foreign policy-making process and the contradictory forces at work there. Hamill is sceptical about the post-apartheid regime's commitment to human rights in the region. His scepticism comes from the contradiction existing between the principle and the culture prevailing in the ANC-led administration. As an example, Hamill names the Defence Ministry. He comments that in the early years of the post-apartheid regime, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) hierarchy and its political masters stressed the need for strong armed forces equipped and ready to meet a conventional military threat from within the region. The then Defence Minister, Joe Modise, declared that “Peace was the ideal situation but ideal situations were hard to find in the real world” (Hamill, 2001:32). Modise's statement followed the one made by President Nelson Mandela himself two weeks after his inauguration. President Nelson Mandela proclaimed that he “saw nothing wrong with arms sales” which, according to him, were for the purpose of defending the sovereignty and the integrity of a country (Hamill, 2001:34). For Hamill, these two statements were clearly based on the realist principle of self-defence which is contrary to the collective defence advocated by idealists.

Whilst the early era following the South African election of April 1994 may be seen as a period where the country was preoccupied with rehabilitating its relations with the international community, the need to develop a cogent foreign policy more reliant on process than

personalities and driven less by single events than broad trends became more acute (Mills, 2000:299). Towards this end, the new incoming president initiated a series of exercises that resulted not only in the reformulation of the DFA's vision and mission statement, but also in the restructuring of the foreign policy decision-making body. By doing so, Mbeki sought to develop a foreign policy based more on reality than on faith, with a stronger sense of purpose and vision.

These changes earned the post-Mandela government foreign policy the reputation of being realist driven. This viewpoint is found in a number of publications by Butler, Hlela, Williams, and Hughes. The reasons brought forward to justify this conclusion are diverse. They include the adoption in 1999 of 'security and wealth creation' as the DFA's new *leitmotif* and fundamental purpose; the government's dedication to becoming a real partner in Africa and supporting regional economic development processes; and the centralisation of the foreign policy decision-making body in the presidency's office. According to these authors, the objective behind all these changes was articulated in 'realist' terms as promoting South Africa's national interest internationally.

These views will be explored in more detail in the chapters that follow.

## **1.7 Chapter Outline**

**Chapter 2** presents the theoretical framework which informs this study. The importance of this section relies on the fact that all the discussions of foreign policies and international relations proceed upon theoretical assumptions (Bull, cited in Burchill and Linklater, 2005:3). This chapter, therefore, intends to provide the reader with the theoretical tools for understanding general patterns underlying the world of international politics, and offers an overview of the International Relations theories of idealism and realism with a particular focus on their characteristics. This will be used in subsequent chapters to make identify the underlying worldviews which informed the foreign policies of presidents Mandela and Mbeki. In order to gain a greater depth of understanding about Mbeki's foreign policy, especially with regard to his policy of 'quiet diplomacy' towards Zimbabwe, the analysis also takes a brief look at the constructivist approach to International Relations.

**Chapter 3** provides an overview of South African foreign policy under Mandela, applying the IR theory expounded in chapter 2. In the last part of this chapter, an attempt is made to interpret Mandela's response to the so-called 'two-Chinas' question within the theoretical framework of idealism vs. realism.

**Chapter 4** explores and assesses South Africa's foreign policy principles and actions under president Mbeki from 1999 to 2008 through the analytical lenses of IR theory. The chapter ends with an analysis of Mbeki's policy of 'quiet diplomacy towards Zimbabwe', informed by the constructivist approach.

**Chapter 5** collates the findings and conclusions drawn from chapters 3 and 4, and makes some recommendations.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter purports to present some general information regarding the context within which the following chapters may be read. Its purpose is twofold. Firstly, to provide a brief overview of the development and purpose of International Relations theory. Secondly, to offer a description of the main purposes that International Relations theory pursues. Thirdly, to explain the core assumptions of the three approaches that will be used as a framework in this study, namely, idealism, realism, and constructivism.

#### **2.2 International Relations Theory: birth and development**

The horrors of the First World War opened new perspectives in the way states conducted their relations with one another in the international arena. Before this, a majority of international lawyers believed that the right to declare war without any external approval was inherent in the nature of state sovereignty (Brown and Ainley, 2005:9). Theologians and canon lawyers of the Middle Ages considered wars as *justum*, that is to say, regular and lawful. At that time, wars were supposed to be used as a means to uphold the law where some wrong had been done. For that specific reason, theologians and canon lawyers tried to establish the exercise of war as a legal doctrine and an ethical principle (Brierly, 1945:19; Dugard, 2005:501). But, progressively, some states turned them into means to get what they wanted from others. Consequently, states that hoped to be victors initiated wars for the reason that benefits were superior to potential losses. Wars were no longer initiated on the basis of "just causes" like self-defence, the recovery of property, the punishment of wrongful acts committed by the state against which war was made, but on the basis of a simple cost-benefit analysis.

The consequences of the First World War were indeed disastrous not only to the states that were attacked, but also to its initiators. Hundred millions of people died, regimes fell, and economies

collapsed. How could such a disaster happen, and what solutions needed to be adopted in order to prevent it from happening again? These were the questions that early students of International Relations had to deal with. This step marked the beginning of the theorising about international relations.

The importance of theorising about international relations has to do with the fact that phenomena we need to investigate do not speak for themselves. Halliday (cited in Burchill and Linklater, 2005:11) gives three reasons to explain why theories are needed. First, there needs to be some preconceptions of which facts are significant and which are not. Second, any set of facts, even if accepted as true and significant, can yield different interpretations. Third, no human agent, academic or not, can rest content with facts alone because all social activity involves moral questions which cannot be decided by facts. In sum, we theorise because sometimes we ask questions that we are not able to answer without previous reflection, without an appropriate abstract thought.

However, it should be noted that all theories of International Relations also called paradigms, traditions, perspectives, discourses, images, or schools of thought do not pursue the same objectives. Drawing from the works done by other thinkers, Burchill and Linklater (2005:11) provide us with a list of eight different purposes that theories pursue:

- Theories explain the laws of international politics or recurrent patterns of national behaviour (Waltz 1979);
- Theories attempt either to explain and predict behaviour or to understand the world 'inside the heads' of actors (Hollis and Smith 1990);
- Theories are traditions of speculation about relations between states which focus on the struggle for power, the nature of international society and the possibility of a world community (Wight 1991);
- Theories are empirical data to test hypotheses about the world such as the absence of war between liberal-democratic states (Doyle 1983);

- Theories analyse and try to clarify the use of concepts such as the balance of power (Butterfield and Wight 1966);
- Theories criticise forms of domination and perspectives which make the socially constructed and changeable seem natural and unalterable (critical theory);
- Theories reflect on how the world ought to be organised and analyse ways in which various conceptions of human rights or global social justice are constructed and defended (normative theory or international ethics);
- Theories reflect on the process of theorising itself; they analyse epistemological claims about how human beings know the world and ontological claims about what the world ultimately consists of—for example, whether it basically consists of sovereign states or individuals with rights against and obligations to the rest of humanity (constitutive theory).

As the above suggests, different kinds of theories are engaged in the field of International Relations. The diversity of theory comes from the nature of the question we ask. Sometimes, the question is about *how* things work, or *why* things happen. Sometimes, the question is about *what* we should do, either in the sense of what action is instrumental to bringing about a particular kind of result or in the sense of what action is morally right. Sometimes, the question is about *what* something or other means, *how* it is to be interpreted (Brown and Ainley 2005:7).

### **2.3 The link between International Relations and Foreign Policy**

The field of International Relations can be defined as the study of how authority and/or power is used to organise and manage trans-border relations between actors, and how this contributes to the establishment, maintenance and transformation of order in the world system (McGowan, Cornelissen and Nel, (2006:12). These relations may involve states, in any combination of two or more, or may exclude states, or may involve states and actors that are not states such as intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and multinational corporations (MNCs).

Foreign Policy, on the other hand, is the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually a state) in international relations (Hill, 2003:3). Hill explains that the phrase ‘an independent actor’ enables the inclusion of phenomena such as the European Union; external relations are ‘official’ to allow the inclusion of output from all parts of the governing mechanisms of the state or enterprise while also maintaining parsimony with respect to the vast number of international transactions now being conducted; policy is the ‘sum’ of these official relations because otherwise every particular action could be seen as a separate foreign policy; the policy is ‘foreign’ because the world is still more separated into distinctive communities than it is a single, homogenising entity. These entities need strategies for coping with foreigners (or strangers) in their various aspects.

Defined like this, the idea of foreign policy implies that everything that a given state generates officially at the international level takes into consideration the values and principles that its political leaders wish to display. From these two definitions, one can say that International Relations and Foreign Policy are closely linked. While the former scrutinises trans-borders relations between all international actors– including states, INGOs, NGOs, and MNCs and tries to understand what influence these relations may have in the establishment, maintenance and transformation of order in the world system, the later seems to be specifically interested in how, officially, states interact with one another. There are various debates about whether foreign policy is a distinct field of study, or whether it forms part of the broader fields of Political Science and International Relations. This discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis. For the purpose of this study, it is assumed that foreign policy is a subfield of International Relations, and can therefore be analysed using the theoretical tools provided by the overarching discipline.

As stated above, the present study intends to investigate South Africa's post-apartheid foreign policies. In so doing, it will try, using two case studies, to show that the classification of Nelson Mandela as an idealist and Thabo Mbeki as a realist reflect simplistic understandings of the perspectives that inform these two statesmen. The next part of this chapter looks at the characteristics of the theories that are going to be used in the rest of the study. Bearing in mind that the field of IR theory is vast and includes a number of different perspectives, but because the purpose of our work is to determine whether the classification made by some South African foreign policy analysts is appropriate, we will firstly look only at the two theories that presidents

Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki have been associated with, namely idealism and realism, respectively.

## **2.4 Idealism**

Besides the fact that Britain, France, and Germany were to be blamed for the destruction on the battlefields of the First World War, there came a realisation that something wrong with the system of International Relations that needed to be revised. Carr (1966:2) revealed that the war of 1914-18 brought an end to the idea that war was a matter which affects solely professional soldiers and dissipated the corresponding impression that international politics could safely be left in the hands of professional diplomats. Subsequently, a great number of thinkers such as Sirs Alfred Zimmern and Philip Noel-Baker and politicians, mostly from America and Britain, gave thought as to how to change the system to prevent a recurrence (Burchill and Linklater, 2005:6). For these thinkers, revising international relations was necessary because the old assumptions and prescriptions of power were flawed. The rationale here was that peace would come about only if the classical balance of power were replaced by a system of collective security (including the idea of the rule of law) in which states transferred domestic concepts and practices to the international sphere.

From the early 1900s to the late 1930s, liberal thinking on international relations impacted significantly on the theory and practice of international relations. Its adherents were motivated by the desire to prevent wars. The First World War shifted liberal thinking towards the recognition that peace is not a natural condition, as its followers thought, but one that needed to be constructed and protected.

Writers such as Sir Alfred Zimmern, S.H. Bailey, Philip Noel-Baker, and David Miltrany in the United Kingdom, and James T. Showell, Pitman Potter, and Parker T. Moon in the United States, to whom the term idealists was applied, assumed that the system of international relations that had given rise to the Great War (1914-1918) was “capable of being transformed into a fundamentally more peaceful and just world order; that under the impact of the awakening of democracy, the growth of the international mind, the development of the League of Nations, the good works of men of peace or the enlightenment spread by their own teachings, it was in fact being transformed; and that their responsibility as students of international relations was to assist



this march of progress to overcome the ignorance, the prejudices, the ill-will, and the sinister interests that stood in its way” (Bull, 2001:58).

Two points can be raised from Bull's quote. Firstly, human society is not "naturally" peace-loving as it seems to be at first. Among the conditions that lead to a peaceful state are the rule of law and democracy. In their attempts to find out what went wrong in 1914-1918, idealists observed that a number of states were led by undemocratic regimes. They came to the conclusion that people do not just go to war, but that war erupts because people are led into it by militarists or autocrats, or because their legitimate aspirations to nationhood are blocked by undemocratic, multinational, imperial systems (Brown and Ainley, 2005:21). One of the solutions to prevent wars from happening was promoting, at the national level, democratic political systems, that is, liberal-democratic, constitutional regimes, and the principle of self-determination.

Secondly, idealists criticised secret diplomacy, secret treaties, and the balance of power that characterised the pre-1914 international system. The mixture of unconstitutional regimes and the anarchic character of the international system created an atmosphere favourable to wars. To eradicate these destructive confrontations, idealists held that new principles of world politics were essential. Collective security and international sanctions were seen as necessary elements of a new world order characterised by the greater interdependence of peoples (Linklater, 2001:221).

United States President Woodrow Wilson, one of the well-known advocates of an international authority for the management of international relations, proclaimed that peace could only be secured with the creation of an international institution to regulate the international anarchy. For President Wilson, security could not be left to secret bilateral diplomatic deals and a blind faith in the balance of power. Like domestic society, international society must have a system of governance which has democratic procedures for coping with disputes, and an international force which could be mobilised if negotiations failed (Dunne, 2001:167). Deeply impressed by the destructive character of modern warfare shown in World War I, President Wilson, in his 'Fourteen points' speech that he gave to the American Congress in January 1917, came up with a set of idealistic political beliefs which, later, gave birth to a distinctive idealist theory of international relations clearly different from realism in the explanations that it offers for events

and tendencies (Nel, 2006:31). Among the idealistic political beliefs that President Wilson spoke about are:

5. Democracy should be promoted in all countries because it is one of the well-established generalisations of international relations that democracies do not fight one another. The institutions of democracy, namely free public opinion and parliamentary accountability, are important controls over the dangerous ambitions of national leaders. Democracies share the same values and seldom have reason to engage in ideological competition.
6. 'Self-determination' of subjected peoples and nations should be encouraged. When colonial peoples or minority national groups are able to rule over themselves, the destructive forces of nationalism are constrained.
7. Lowering barriers between countries encourages interdependence and raises the costs of conflict.
8. Strengthening international law and creating international organisations will also promote peace and co-operation (Nel, 2006:32).

Proposed by President Wilson in 1917 as instruments to end destructive conflicts and promote peace and co-operation among states, the principles still form part of the assumptions upon which the International Relations theory of idealism is based (Viotti and Kauppi, 1993; Nel, 2006). They also formed the basis for the founding of the League of Nations, which was created at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919-1920 with primary responsibility to provide the collective security that nations tried, in vain, to find under the old system based on the balance of power. The main assumptions of idealism are outlined below. This is important as it is imperative to assessing what aspects of South Africa's foreign policy under president Mandela could legitimately be characterised as idealist, and whether, in fact, idealism was the main driving force behind the country's international relations during this time.

Firstly, idealists recognise the fact that international politics take place in an anarchical arena. However, they do not agree that the absence of a central authority above all actors condemns them to a perpetual competition of one against all, as contended by realists. While they do believe that there is competition in international system, they hold, as Nel (2006:33) states, that

humans learn from their experience. Once they realise that all-out confrontation on a specific issue leads only to mutual disappointment and losses, they become willing to consider options that provide some chances for mutual gains, even if these gains are not the maximum the states aimed for at the beginning.

Relatedly, although the international system is anarchic (without a ruler), it has never been anomic (without rules) (Little, 2001:299). Little considers that an important dimension of globalisation has been the establishment of worldwide regimes to foster rule-governed activity within the international system. As a result, there is now no international intercourse devoid of regimes, where states are not circumscribed, to some extent or other, by the existence of mutually accepted sets of rules. In connection with this, idealists posit that the absence of war cannot always be explained in terms of an existence of a balance of power. It can also be the result of the fact that states share a number of values. This explains why idealists tend to favour co-operation between states on an increasing range of issues such as global security, health, economic development, environment, and so forth. But, for them, co-operation between states needs to take place in a well structured environment in which states can trust each others. In this regard, the **respect for international law and international organisations** appears to be of a great importance.

Secondly, idealists assert that **morality plays an important role in international affairs**. They point to the historical record to prove their point. Since the establishment of the modern state system, states have established many international moral principles and regimes through co-operation with one another. Religious freedom has been recognised, slavery has been outlawed and abolished, humane rules of warfare have been accepted, a universal Declaration of Human Rights has been accepted by most states in the world, torture has been outlawed, and the world community has taken steps to punish perpetrators of genocide (Nel, 2006:34). The idea that the state should respect the human rights of its citizens, as Schmitz and Sikkink (2002:518) declare, is an old one dating back to the struggles for religious freedom and the secular writings of Kant, Locke and Rousseau. The US Bill of Rights and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizens were the most significant early transactions of efforts to give the individual special and inalienable protections. What has emerged more recently, Schmitz and Sikkink argue, is the idealist-driven idea that not only states, but individuals, can be subjects in

international law and that **human rights should be an integral part of foreign policy and international relations.**

Thirdly, idealists claim that **non-state actors are also important entities in international politics.** Idealists agree that the state is a very important actor in international affairs, but they refuse to regard it as necessarily the most important. In today's world of diverse and complex challenges, global governance involves a variety of international actors – including states, IGOs, NGOs, MNCs, transnational social movements, and individuals. In light of how the balance between states and non-state actors has shifted over the past few decades, idealists believe that any interpretation of international relations must now take the significance of non-state actors.

Fourthly, idealists maintain that **the agenda of international politics is extensive and not dominated primarily by military-security issues** as suggested by realists. For idealist adherents, foreign affairs agendas have expanded and diversified over recent decades such that economic and social issues are often at the forefront of foreign policy debates (Viotti and Kauppi, 1993:8). In connection with this, Henry Alfred Kissinger, former US National Security Advisor and Secretary of State under President Richard Nixon, himself a realist, said in 1975 that:

Progress in dealing with the traditional agenda is no longer enough. A new and unprecedented kind of issues has emerged. The problems of energy, resources, environment, pollution, the uses of spaces and the seas now rank with questions of military security, ideology, and territorial rivalry which have traditionally made up the diplomatic agenda (cited in Keohane and Nye, 1997:3).

As the above suggests, there is an increasingly wide-ranging agenda in international affairs, with political, economic, and social issues that are as, or more, important than military-security issues. In summary, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, collective security, and co-operation are some of the subjects that are very important in the idealist lexicon.

After the collapse of the League of Nations, which, sometimes in the history of the field of international relations, is mistakenly considered as the end of the idealism tradition by some writers, certain fundamental idealist principles remained. A number of these fundamental tenets

constitute the core principles of what subsequently became known as liberal institutionalism. In short, liberal institutionalists, like idealists before them, insist on international institutions to carry out a number of tasks that the state cannot perform on its own. By so doing, they have been in the process of perpetuating the idealist tradition.

## **2.5 Realism**

In his book entitled 'The twenty years' crisis: 1919-1939', Carr asserts that the three essential tenets implicit in Machiavelli's doctrine constitute the foundation stones of the realist philosophy. "First, history is a sequence of cause and effect, whose course can be analysed and understood by intellectual effort, but not (as the idealists, or utopians as he renamed them, believe) directed by imagination. Second, theory does not (as the utopians assume) create practice, but practice theory. Third, politics are not (as the utopians pretend) a function of ethics, but ethics of politics". From this quote, Carr seems to suggest that the purpose of a theory should be to collect, classify and analyse existing facts in order to draw inferences, and not the other way around as, according to him, idealists did.

In the same vein, Morgenthau (1973:3) notes that the test by which a theory must be judged is not *a priori* and abstract but empirical and pragmatic. A theory, according to Morgenthau, must be judged not by some preconceived abstract principle or concept unrelated to reality, but by its purpose, which is to bring order and meaning to the plethora of phenomena that exist in the real world.

If the purpose of a theory is to collect and analyse existing facts, this, according to Carr (1966:5), does not apply to idealism. Carr explains that idealists paid little attention to existing facts or the analysis of cause and effect, but rather devoted themselves wholeheartedly to the elaboration of visionary projects.

The combination of the decline of liberal thinking in the late 1930s and the outbreak of World War II (signalling to many the failure of idealism) revitalised the realist perception of the role of power, defined as capability relative to other states. Keohane (1986:9) states that since 1945, discussions of foreign policy have been carried on in the language of political realism \_that is, the language of power and interests rather than ideals or norms. In the same vein, Morgenthau

characterises international politics as the struggle for power. According to him, this could be understood by assuming that statesmen “think and act in terms of interest defined as power” (1966:29).

The idea of power being the most important thing in international relations lasted until the Cold War (mid-1940s-early 1990s). Despite the fact that the Cold War was a period of conflict, tension and competition between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies, no real war occurred during that period. Many realists attributed the absence of war to the bipolar nature of the post-war international system. With the end of the Cold War, most realists agreed that bipolarity had come to an end, although they disagreed about when and why it happened.

Drawing on classical realism's apparent failure to develop an operational measure of polarity that could distinguish cause from effect, Waltz built a formal deductive theory of international relations which he called neorealism. Waltz's theory emphasises the importance of the structure (anarchy) of the international system and its role as the primary determinant of state behaviour. Neorealism is distinctive from traditional or classical realism in a number of ways. Lamy (2001:185-186) mentions three of them. Firstly, neorealists believe that the effects of structure are as important as the actions and interactions of states in the international system. According to Waltz, structure is defined by the ordering principle of the international system, which is anarchy, and the distribution of capabilities across units, which are states. For neorealist adherents, these two elements participate in shaping all foreign policy choices and, therefore, must be considered in our attempts to explain international politics.

Secondly, contrary to realists who see power as an end in itself, neorealists think that power is more than the accumulation of military resources and the ability to use this power to coerce and control other states in the system. In the neorealist lexicon, power is simply the combined capabilities of a state. States are differentiated in the system by their power and not by their function. Power gives a state a place or position in the international system and that shapes the state's behaviour.

Thirdly, neorealists reject classical realist's view on how states react to the condition of anarchy. Lame explains that to classical realists, anarchy is a condition of the system, and states react to it

according to their size, location, domestic politics, and leadership qualities. Neorealists, in contrast, suggest that anarchy defines the system. All states are functionally similar units, meaning that they all experience the same constraints presented by anarchy and strive to maintain their position in the system. Consequently, neorealists believe that what results in differences in policy between states is the combination of differences in their power and capabilities.

The importance of Waltz's theory, as Keohane (1986:15) points it, lies less in his initiation of a new line of theoretical inquiry or speculation than in his attempt to systematise political realism into a rigorous, deductive systemic theory of international politics. In this sense, the Waltzian synthesis is referred to as neorealism to indicate both its intellectual affinity with the classical realism of E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, and Reinhold Niebuhr and its elements of originality and distinctiveness.

Despite these differences, it is possible to identify certain fundamental assumptions which are common to all realists—whether classical neo-, or other.

Firstly, realists **regard the state as the major actor in international relations**. The concept of statism, which they utilise to indicate this reality, refers to the idea of the state as the legitimate representative of the collective will of the people. For realists, states represent the key unit of analysis. Therefore, they conclude, the study of international relations is the study of relations among these units (Viotti and Kauppi, 1993:5). The legitimacy of the state is what enables it to put into effect its authority internally in the making and enforcement of law (Dunne and Schmidt, 2001:143). The meaning of the sovereign state is inextricably tied with the use of force. In connection with this, Dunne and Schmidt declare that those who see anarchy as merely a chaos or a state of lawlessness are misleading. The existence of sovereign authority implies that individuals need not to worry about their own security, since this is provided for them in the form of a system of law, police protection, prisons, and other coercive measures. At the international level, anarchy has to be seen simply as a lack of central authority above all sovereign states.

Based on the argument given above, **realists maintain that there is a distinction between domestic and international politics**. While the former is able to constrain and channel the

power-seeking ambition of citizens in a less violent direction, the latter is much less able to do so. This also explains why, at the international level, states compete with other states for interests, security, power, and so on because more for one means less for another. In an anarchic system, each sovereign state tends to think about itself as its own highest authority.

The idea of states being the main actors in the realm of international politics goes against one of the principles stated by the idealists. Idealists believe that the establishment of international institutions is one of the conditions to guarantee a peaceful world. Realists, on the contrary, think that the only actors that really count in the landscape of modern global politics are states. Two reasons have been given to support this statement. Firstly, according to realists, international organisations, transnational corporations, and religious denominations, like all other ideologies, rise and fall. Secondly, realists believe that **non-state actors are not autonomous from state power** (Dunne and Schmidt, 2001:151). In his well-known essay entitled “The False Promise of International Institutions”, John Mearsheimer (1994:7) examines the claim made by some international relations theories (including liberal institutionalism) that institutions push states away from war and promote peace. He comes to the conclusion that **institutions have minimal influence on state behaviour** and, therefore, cannot prevent states from behaving the way they do to secure and maximise their interests.

Secondly, realists consider the **survival of the state as the most important thing**. The idea of ensuring the survival of the state by all means derives from the doctrine of *raison d'état*, or reason of state. The point made by realists related to this is that outside the boundaries of a state, there is a condition of anarchy, meaning that international politics take place in an environment that has no authority above the individual sovereign states. Realists believe that in a world where there is no authority, the first priority of state leaders is to guarantee the survival of their state. This is merely because if the state's existence was to be jeopardised, all its other interests such as economic, environmental, and humanitarian would not stand a chance of ever being realised (Dunne and Schmidt, 2001:144). But, given that the survival of the state cannot be guaranteed under anarchy, state leaders are frequently obliged to cheat, lie, and kill if necessary to secure their states.



From the above, one can understand that **power is the key concept in the realist lexicon**. Realists believe that only states with power have a better chance of surviving than states with less power because, as Morgenthau (1966:29) points out, international politics, like national politics, is a struggle for power. Realists focus on material power – mainly in the form of military strength. According to Viotti and Kauppi (1993:56), however, economic factors are also very important to realists because they affect national power or capabilities. These two authors observe that industrial countries that effectively combine technology with capital, skilled labour and raw materials not only enjoy a higher standard of living but also tend to have more leverage in their relations with others. In addition to trade, financial, and monetary influence that flows from a strong economy, military capabilities are usually greatest in states with advanced industrial economies.

Realists believe that **states are self-interested oriented** and that their **behaviour is largely shaped by the anarchic structure of the international system** (Mearsheimer, 1994:5). For this reason, they recommend states to make use of all necessary means to safeguard or increase their interests while dealing with others. In short, realism emphasises the constraints on politics imposed by human selfishness ('egoism') and the absence of international government ('anarchy'), which require the primacy in all political life of power and security (Gilpin, cited in Donnelly 2005). In this regard, unlike idealists, **realists do not believe in the natural harmony of interests among states**.

Thirdly, **realists are very sceptical about the role of morality in international affairs**. Realist supporters frequently speak of a dual moral standard: one moral standard for individual citizens living inside the state and a different standard for the state in its external relations with other states. The exclusion of morality from foreign policy is an important feature of realism. Beyond the appeals to anarchy and egoism, many realists argue that morality is inappropriate in foreign policy because international politics is a distinct realm of human endeavour with its own standards and rules (Donnelly, 2000:161-164). For realist adherents, the nature of the environment within which international politics take place has created a necessary condition for state leaders to act in a way that would be unacceptable or immoral for the individual. For this reason, realists consider the act of cheating, lying and killing as moral duties of state leaders,

since their task is to preserve the life of the state and the ethical community it contains (Dunne and Schmidt, 2001:144).

Fourthly, the anarchic character of the international system has given an exclusive **emphasis to the principle of self-help** (or self-interest). According to Waltz (1979:102) “the state among states conducts its affairs in brooding shadow of violence”. This is, he explains, because “some states may at any time use force, all states must be prepared to do so or live at the mercy of their militarily more vigorous neighbours”. Among states, the state of nature is a state of war. Contrary to domestic politics where a wide range of institutions and mechanisms seek to ensure the welfare of individuals, at the international level these are either non-existent or extremely weak. Related to this, realists posit that each state actor is responsible for ensuring their well-being and survival. In this sense, they do not think it is prudent for a state to entrust its safety and survival to another actor or international institution such as the League of Nations or the United Nations because, as Machiavelli stated, today's friend can quickly become tomorrow's enemy (Dunne and Schmidt, 2001:144).

The principle of self-help is also strengthened by the fact that realists view the state as a unitary actor, that is to say that it faces the world as an integrated unit (Viotti and Kauppi, 1993:32). The idea behind this is that political differences within the state are ultimately resolved authoritatively such that the government of the state speaks with one voice for the state as a whole. This emphasis on the unitary nature has led to the belief that the state is essentially a rational actor. A rational foreign policy decision-making process, as Viotti and Kauppi explain, “would include a statement of objectives, consideration of all feasible alternatives in terms of existing capabilities available to the state, the relative likelihood of attaining these various objectives under consideration, and the benefits or cost associated with each alternative”. In brief, it assumes that any chosen behaviour can be understood as optimising material self-interest (Neuman, 1998:5.)

## **2.6 Constructivism**

The end of the Cold War undermined the explanatory pretensions of neorealists and neoliberals, neither of which had predicted, nor could adequately comprehend, the systemic transformations reshaping the global order. It also undermined the critical theorists' assumption that theory drove

practice in any narrow or direct fashion, as global politics increasingly demonstrated dynamics that contradicted realist expectations and prescriptions. The end of the Cold War thus opened a space for alternative explanatory perspectives and prompted critically inclined scholars to move away from a narrowly defined meta-theoretical critique (Reus-Smit, 2005:195). By the beginning of the 1990s, a new generation of young scholars emerged and initiated a new line of enquiry or speculation about world politics called constructivism. The writings of Friedrich Kratochwil (1989), Nicholas Onuf (1989) and Alexander Wendt (1987, 1992) established constructivist ideas as a genuinely radical alternative to conventional IR theories (Brown and Ainley, 2005:49).

The debate between neorealists and neoliberals has been based on a shared commitment to rationalism. Like all social theories, rational choice directs us to ask some questions and not others, treating the identities and interests of agents as exogenously given and focusing on how the behaviour of agents generates outcomes. As such, rationalism offers a fundamentally behavioural conception of both processes and institutions (Wendt, 1992:615). Its failure to explain systemic transformations that occurred in the 1990s encouraged this new generation of scholars to re-examine old questions and issues long viewed through neorealist and neoliberal lenses. These scholars challenge the assumptions of rationalism, particularly the notion of an unchanging reality of international politics. Anarchy, as Zehfuss (2005:3-4) declares, is not an unavoidable feature of international reality; it is, in Wendt's famous words, "what states make of it". It follows from this that practice influences outcome. This leads constructivist followers to the conclusion that the social world is constructed, not given. States may be self-interested but they continuously (re) define what that means. In other words, the identities and interests of states that rationalists take as given and which they see as resulting in international relations are not in fact given but are things that states have created (Smith, 2001:244).

Despite the divisions amongst constructivists regarding certain issues, all of them have, according to Reus-Smit (2005:196), sought to articulate and explore three core ontological propositions about social life, propositions which, they claim, illuminate more about world politics than rival rationalist assumptions. First, to the extent that structures can be said to shape the behaviour of social and political actors, be they individuals or states, constructivists hold that **normative or ideational structures are just as important as material structures**. Where neorealists emphasise the material structure of the balance of military power, constructivists

argue that systems of shared ideas, beliefs and values also have structural characteristics, and that they exert a powerful influence on social and political action. This, they argue, is because (1) “material resources only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded” (Wendt, cited in Adler, 2002:100), and (2) “normative and ideational factors are thought to shape the social identities of political actors”. In this sense, social facts, which are facts only by human agreement and which account for the majority of the fact studied in IR, differ from other physical facts, because unlike the latter, their existence depends on human consciousness and language (Adler, 2002:100).

In the same vein, Brown and Ainley (2005:49) posit that mistaking a social fact for a brute fact is a cardinal error, because it leads to the ascription of a natural status to conditions that have been produced and may be, in principle, open to change. For Brown and Ainley, if we treat ‘anarchy’ as a given, something that conditions state action without itself being conditioned by state action, we will miss the point that ‘anarchy’ is, as Wendt declares, what states make of it and that it does not, as such, dictate any particular course of action. In the field of IR, anarchy means no centralised political authority above sovereign states’ but does not, though it may, mean chaos. Viewed in this context, the possibility exists that **within an anarchical framework norms can emerge.**

Second, contrary to rationalists who believe that actors' interests are exogenously determined, meaning that actors, be they individuals or states, encounter one another with a pre-existing set of preferences, constructivists argue that **understanding how actors develop their interests is crucial to explaining a wide range of international political phenomena** that rationalists ignore or misunderstand. In order to explain interest formation, constructivists focus on social identities of individuals or states.

Third, constructivists assert that **agents and structures are mutually constituted.** Normative and ideational structures may well condition the identities and interests of actors, but, as Reus-Smit remarks, those structures would not exist if it were not for the knowledgeable practices of those actors. Adler (2002:100) comments that although individuals carry knowledge, ideas and meanings in their heads, they also know, think and feel only in the context of and with reference to collective or intersubjective understandings, including rules and language. It is from this

context or background that people borrow the epistemic, normative and ideological understandings, rules and discourses that make individuals into agents by enabling them to act upon the world in which they find themselves (Gould, cited in Adler, 2002:100). Institutionalised norms and ideas, as Boli Meyer and Thomas (cited in Reus-Smit, 2005:197) affirm, “define the meaning and identity of the individual actor and the patterns of appropriate economic, political, and cultural activity engaged in by those individuals”.

Constructivism **emphasises the role of norms in world politics**. Its proponents argue that norms have a significant effect on state behaviour. Norms can be defined as standards of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity. They are “shared moral assessments which prompt justification for action and leave an extensive trail of communication among actors that can be studied” (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998:891). According to these two authors, international and regional norms are linked. Domestic norms are deeply entwined with the workings of international norms. The reason for this, they argue, is that many international norms began as domestic norms and become international through the efforts of entrepreneurs of various kinds. Norms come in varying strengths with different norms commanding different levels of agreement. In order to understand this agreement process, it is important to examine the “life cycle” of norms.

Norms influence can be understood as a three-stage process, involving “norm emergence”; “norm cascade”, and “internationalisation” (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998:895). The characteristic of the first stage, these two authors declare, is persuasion by norm entrepreneurs. At this stage, what norm entrepreneurs do is try to convince a critical mass of states (norm leaders) to embrace new norms. Norm entrepreneurs are very important for norm emergence because they are the ones that actually call attention to issues or even “create” issues by using language that names, interprets, and dramatises them. The construction of cognitive frames is an essential component of norm entrepreneurs' political strategies, because, when they are successful, the new frames resonate with broader public understandings and are adopted as new ways of talking about and understanding issues. However, in constructing their frames, norm entrepreneurs face firmly embedded alternative norms and frames that create alternative perceptions of both appropriateness and interest. As van der Westhuizen (2004:5) declares, the potential receptivity of a norm is enhanced when it fits with the normative practices and beliefs

of the actor; if the arguments are held to be congruent with the self-conceptualised identity of the actor; and if the argument matches with existing social structures that are a consequence of the belief systems through which societies are ordered. In other words, new norms never enter a normative vacuum, but instead emerge in a highly contested normative space where they must compete with other norms and perceptions of interests.

To promote their norms at the international level, all norm entrepreneurs need some kind of organisational platforms. Sometimes, these platforms are constructed specifically for the purpose of promoting the norm, as are many NGOs and IGOs. But, whatever their platforms, norm promoters and the organisations they inhabit usually need to secure the support of state actors to endorse their norms and make norm socialisation a part of their agenda, and different organisational platforms provide different kinds of tools for entrepreneurs to do this (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998:899-900).

The second stage, norm cascade, is characterised more by a dynamic of imitation as the norm leaders attempt to socialise other states to become norm followers. Framing new norms is essential to overcome extrinsic constraints, but, as van der Westhuizen (2004:4) comments, the minimum extrinsic requirement is that an argument must be heard (securing an audience and assuring the credibility of the institution that advocates the norm), and intrinsic barriers include the fit with dominant belief systems, notions of identity and social institutions.

The exact motivation behind this varies with the norm and the entrepreneur. Finnemore and Sikkink comment that for many of the social norms of interest to political scientists, these motivations include empathy, altruism, and ideational commitment. Empathy, they declare, exists when actors have the capacity for participating in another's feelings or ideas. Such empathy may lead to empathetic interdependence, where actors are interested in the welfare of others for its own sake, even if this has no effect on their own material well-being or security. Altruism exists when actors actually take action designed to benefit another even at the risk of significant harm to the actor's own well-being. Ideational commitment is the main motivation when entrepreneurs promote norms or ideas because they believe in the ideals and the values embodied in the norms, even though the pursuit of the norms may have no effect on their well-being. At the end of this phase, norm internationalisation occurs.

Norm internationalisation is the final stage of the “life cycle” of a norm. At the far end of the norm cascade, norms may become so widely accepted that they are internationalised by actors and achieve a “taken-for-granted” quality that makes conformance with the norm almost automatic. Internationalised norms can be both extremely powerful (because behaviour according to the norm is not questioned) and hard to discern (because actors do not seriously consider or discuss whether to conform). Completion of the “life cycle” is not, as Finnemore and Sikkink declare, an inevitable process. Many emergent norms fail to reach a tipping point.

In summary, as the above suggests, constructivists are not interested in how things are, nor in how they ought to be, but in how they became what they are. Taken in this context, constructivism appears totally different from idealism and realism. From a constructivist perspective, international structure is determined by international distribution of ideas. Shared ideas, expectations, and beliefs about appropriate behaviour are what give the world structure, order, and stability. Norms channel and regularise behaviour; often limit the range of choice and constrain action (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998:894).

## **2.7 Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter has been to present the reader with a brief overview of IR theories of idealism, realism, and constructivism. Taken as a whole, the field of IR attempts to provide a conceptual model upon which international relations can be analysed. This is done through a wide range of theories. Each of them is reductive and essentialist to different degrees, relying on different sets of assumptions respectively. As Brown and Ainley (2005:1) observe, how we understand and interpret the world is partly dependent on how we define the world we are trying to understand and interpret.

Having explained how idealists, realists, and constructivists define the world, the next step of our study will be to interpret the foreign policies of presidents Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki in light of these theories to see whether one can justifiably classify the former as merely idealist and the latter as realist as is commonly done.

# **CHAPTER 3**

## **SOUTH AFRICA'S FOREIGN POLICY UNDER PRESIDENT NELSON ROLIHLEHLA MANDELA (1994-1999)**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The aim of the present chapter is fourfold. Firstly, it gives the reader a general idea of South Africa's foreign policy pre-1994. This lays the foundation upon which the present study stands and helps to explain the turn towards a foreign policy focused on human rights and democracy post-1994. Secondly, it provides an overview of South Africa's foreign policy under President Nelson Mandela. Thirdly, it scrutinises President Mandela's response to the so-called 'two-Chinas' policy. Ultimately, it hopes to provide an answer to the question whether Mandela's foreign policy was mostly idealist.

### **3.2 South Africa's Foreign Policy pre-1994**

After World War I, South Africa evolved towards a position in which it enjoyed the capacity to enter into relations with other states free from the control of Britain. At the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, it was decided that the British dominions should acquire international status. Following this, South Africa (at the time the Union of South Africa) became a member of the League of Nations. One year later, it was appointed as mandatory power over South West Africa with direct accountability to the Council of the League. At the 1926 Imperial conference, the dominions were recognised as autonomous nations within the British empire, equal in status to Great Britain, and in no way subordinate to one another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs (Kalley, 2001:65-69; Dugard, 2005:85). Thus, free from Britain, South Africa created in 1927 its own Department of External Affairs which became the Department of Foreign Affairs in 1960 and proceeded to establish diplomatic missions in many parts of the world (Pfister, 2005:13).



From 1919 to 1948, many efforts were made by successive South African governments in their respective foreign policies to improve the country's position in the international arena. Mills and Baynham (1994:13) declare that before 1945 the then Union of South Africa was a highly respected member not only of the British Commonwealth, but also of the League of Nations. Under Field Marshal J.C. Smuts' leadership, the country even enjoyed a reputation of being one of the most important actors of the international community. In addition to his earlier contribution to the formation of the League of Nations at the Peace Treaty of Versailles in 1919, Smuts, then Prime Minister of the Union (1937-1945), played an important role in drawing up the preamble to the UN Charter.

Conscious of its status as the most important African country in terms of its economic and military strength, South Africa began to entertain the notion of itself as a great power having a role to play in the independent African territories. The triumph of the National Party (NP) in the parliamentary election of May 26, 1948, definitely marked the break from the past in South Africa's foreign policy. The NP made racial policy the chief issue in its campaign, using for the first time the term apartheid to describe their policy of segregation. Upon assuming office, the new Prime Minister, who was also minister of external affairs, D.F. Malan, in a nationwide broadcast (June 4, 1948), outlined his government's foreign policy. The interests of South Africa, he said, would always be placed first (Amry, 1970:130).

The term apartheid (from the Afrikaans word for apartness or separateness) was used as a political slogan of the NP in 1948. The rules of apartheid dictated that people be legally classified into racial groups (Black, White, Coloured, and Indians) and also separated from one another on the basis of legal classification and unequal rights.

Until 1945, the international law was largely concerned with states and their relationships with one another. The prohibition on intervention in the domestic affairs of states, enshrined in the Covenant of the League of Nations, was respected as a guiding principle (Dugard, 2005:309). In this regard, the manner in which a state treated its citizens was generally not regarded as a factor to be considered in deciding whether or not to admit a state to the community of nations. As a result of this, neither the League of Nations nor any state raised objections to South Africa's

racial policies when it became a member of the international community. South Africa's policy of apartheid was simply regarded as an internal affair.

After World War II, the question of human rights became a concern of international law. The enormity of the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime radically changed the nature of international law. This experience compelled statesmen to accept the need for the new world order in which the state was no longer free to threaten its own nationals as it pleased. This new order was proclaimed by the Charter of the United Nations, which recognised the promotion of human rights as a principal goal of the new world organisation, and by the London Charter of 1945 (Dugard, 2005:309). Subsequently, South Africa began to face strong criticisms on the part of the international community.

Locally, the implementation and enforcement of apartheid rules were accompanied by the creation of anti-apartheid movements. These movements –including the African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), the South African Communist Party (SAPC), the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), the Non-European Unity Movement, the Black Consciousness, and many others had one purpose in mind: use all necessary means to draw the international community's attention on South Africa's racial policies. They all had faith in world public opinion and international organisations to help bring about change in South Africa. They believed that the UN would act on their behalf because of the Charter's commitment to equality and justice. Overall, these movements provided an organisation through which the frustrations of those whose rights had been restricted could be channelled, but their actions sometimes met with strong reprisals on the part of the government. As a result, violence and counter-violence spread within and outside the country.

The Sharpeville crisis of March 1960<sup>4</sup> marked a new stage in the Union's deteriorating international position. The banning of the ANC and PAC, together with the imprisonment of their leaders, undermined South Africa's political allies who were prepared to support Pretoria's claim that it was a major force in the maintenance of political order and democratic values in the subcontinent. In 1961, the country was forced to withdraw from the British Commonwealth.

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<sup>4</sup>In March 1960, 69 people were gunned down by the police in the South African township of Sharpeville, next to the town of Vereeniging, precipitating a popular uprising.

From that year onwards, South Africa's internal policies were also considered to be a possible threat to world peace by the Security Council. Consequently, it stood condemned by numerous resolutions adopted by both the Security Council and the General Assembly.

As one of the fifty-two founding members of the UN, South Africa had seemed destined to play an important role in its development. Instead, there was a steady deterioration of its relations with the UN, due to the issue of South-West Africa, the treatment of persons of Indian origin in South Africa and the whole question of apartheid. In 1974, South Africa was suspended from taking its seat in the General Assembly (Kalley, 2001:113). By 1977, its erstwhile allies in the West decided to distance themselves from Pretoria and called for mandatory sanctions on arms sales (Barber and Barret, 1990).

The late 1970s and 1980s were decades characterised by political turmoil unparalleled in South African history. Riots and concomitant repression intensified, and the international community reacted by tightening the sanctions (Kalley, 2000:73). The growing international pressure together with the dramatic events that followed in the country forced the government, under President F.W. de Klerk, to renounce its racial policies. Recognising the fact that South Africa's international position could not be improved without internal accommodation, President de Klerk embarked on the most radical period of political reform yet seen in South Africa. President de Klerk brought a very different political style to Pretoria, breaking fundamentally with the apartheid ideology of his National Party. In the domestic arena, he presented himself as the reformer, symbolised by the remarkable unbanning of liberation movements, the release ultimately of all political prisoners and, very importantly, the freeing of Nelson Mandela after 27 years of imprisonment (Pfister, 2005:125). The subsequent negotiations between the government and the ANC led to the first democratic elections in 1994, which brought into power Nelson Mandela.

### **3.3 South Africa's Foreign Policy Principles under President Mandela**

In 1994, following the first non-racial elections of April, South Africa emerged from decades of international isolation due to the apartheid policies. On assuming power, “the ANC faced the formidable task of translating the gains of liberation diplomacy into a pragmatic and principled foreign policy. It also had to stamp its own philosophical imprimatur on foreign policy and

refashion in its own image the institutional architecture inherited from successive apartheid regimes” (Alden and le Pere, 2003:11).

Not surprisingly, the defence and assertion of human rights figured prominently in the preliminary debates in the early declarations<sup>5</sup> of South Africa's future foreign policy (Spence, 2001:4). After all, as Spence points out, the new South Africa was in part the creation of a massive human rights campaign waged by a host of non-governmental organisations, and the anti-apartheid movement in particular, governments in the Third World and their representatives in a variety of international organisations, most notably the United Nations, on behalf of the peoples whose rights were restricted. Thus, “South Africa felt morally obliged to help secure universal adherence to basic human rights, to help ensure that people are not threatened by arbitrary and oppressive rule” (Sharpe, 1996).

Prior to the 1994 elections, in his well-known article entitled “South Africa's Future Foreign Policy”, the then leader of the ANC, Nelson Mandela, set the tone for the shape and conduct of South African diplomacy in the aftermath of apartheid. The pillars upon which Nelson Mandela declared South Africa's foreign policy would rest were the following:

- That issues of **human rights are central to international relations** and an understanding that they extend beyond the political, embracing the economic, social and environmental;
- That just and lasting solutions to the problems of humankind can only come through the **promotion of democracy worldwide**;
- That considerations of **justice and respect for international law** should guide the relations between nations;

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<sup>5</sup>Before it took office, the ANC had published a number of papers and articles about future foreign policy. They included an article by Mandela in the American journal *Foreign Affairs*. (Mandela 1993), and papers from an ANC study group, including ‘Foreign Policy Perspectives in a Democratic South Africa’ (ANC 1993 and 1994) (Barber, 2004:88).

- That **peace is the goal for which all nations should strive**, and where this breaks down, internationally agreed and non-violent mechanisms, including effective arms-control regimes, must be employed;
- That the concerns and interests of the continent of Africa should be reflected in our foreign policy choices;
- That economic development depends on growing **regional and international economic cooperation in an interdependent world** (Mandela, 1993:87; African National Congress, 1994).

Within this framework, special recognition was therefore given to a number of themes; namely human rights, democracy, the rule of law; peace; and cooperation between states. The ANC leader wanted to infuse the practice of international affairs with an orientation towards the promotion of civil liberties and democratisation because for him and his movement, the struggle for an apartheid-free South Africa was a struggle for fundamental human rights. It was no coincidence, therefore, that once the ANC was in power, human rights became an important leitmotif in its foreign policy. The ANC's approach was also informed by a desire to make Africa and Southern Africa in particular the primary theatre of South African activism, to promote regional development and to participate constructively in multilateral institutions (Alden and le Pere, 2003:12).

Translated into the language of IR theory, the approach adopted by the ANC can be classified as 'idealism' (Barber, 2004:92). As was shown in the previous chapter, idealist adherents are motivated by the desire to prevent wars and build a peaceful world. They concentrate on what 'ought to be', and in doing so seek to change what 'is'. As Graham Evans and Jeffrey Newham (quoted in Barber, 2004:92) state, idealism stresses the importance of moral values, legal norms, internationalism and harmony of interests as guides to foreign policy making, rather than the considerations of national interest and power. Idealists, they add, emphasise the need for peace and the peaceful settlement of disputes; they believe that peace is both achievable and indivisible; they have faith in reason and conscience as sources of international behaviour; and they are advocates of collective security. The points outlined by Mandela prior to the 1994, as highlighted above, clearly constituted almost an idealist blueprint.

The logic behind the idealist approach to international relations is that the conditions within a state can be projected into international politics; that the values and principles of their own society can be replicated elsewhere (Evans and Newman, cited in Barber 2004:92). This is in stark contrast to the realist belief that domestic and international politics are distinctly separate spheres of activity. By adopting these principles, the ANC “reasoned that as it had achieved a settlement with the apartheid regime, it could do business with anybody. In that spirit, it declared itself ready to establish links with all members of the international community, through the policy of universality”, which “was an attempt to de-ideologise foreign policy so that relations could be establish ‘with all countries without implying support for their internal or external policies” (Barber, 2004:92).

As the above suggests, at the international level, the Mandela administration's objectives were to influence world politics, to help ensure that the world is more secure, peaceful, democratic, humane, equitable and people-centred (Sharpe, 1996; Nzimande, 1996). In so doing, it allied itself –rhetorically at least -closely with the idealist way of thinking and reasoning about world politics. In light of this, we now turn to a case study of Mandela's foreign policy to determine whether it was in line with the idealist logic.

### **3.4 Interpreting President Nelson Mandela's Response to the ‘Two Chinas’ Question**

Among all the foreign policy dilemmas that the government of national unity (GNU) faced since it came to power in 1994, the ‘two Chinas’ question is one of those which has generated a huge number of debates regarding South Africa's foreign policy formulation. The ‘two Chinas’ question represents a good case for this particular study because it shows that, although South Africa's foreign policy was mainly idealist driven under Mandela's presidency, Mandela did not act accordingly to idealist principles without fail. In fact, in this specific case, he acted in a realist way, which was contrary to the values that he was supposed to promote. As Daniels (1995:158) correctly notes, the dilemma was both a moral and an interests-based one. The economic interests at state were clearly enormous and dominated the debate, but the human rights issues involved were worthy of serious attention for in its pre-election blueprint the ANC clearly declared that it will “canonise human rights in our international relations” (ANC, 1994:5-8). The

way South Africa handled this dilemma provides a clear indication of which factors were primarily driving South Africa's new foreign policy. The 'two Chinas' policy along with the so-called 'quiet diplomacy' towards Zimbabwe, that will be examined in the fourth chapter, are two of many examples which illustrate that the classification of Mandela as an idealist and Mbeki as a realist reflects simplistic understandings of the perspectives that inform these two statesmen.

When President Nelson Mandela suddenly announced on 27 November 1996 that South Africa would no longer recognise the Republic of China (ROC), but would open official diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) in its stead, he caught the world by surprise. "In what was a fittingly bizarre end to a situation that continued to defy all expectations, the post-apartheid government made its first significant foreign policy decision. The remarkable level of public debate, the inter-departmental conflicts, the role of interest groups and party politics which accompanied the decision to switch recognition gave the South African government and the public as a whole its first exposure to the vagaries of conducting foreign policy in a democracy" (Alden, 2001:119). What factors influenced President Nelson Mandela's decision to recognise the People's Republic of China as the sole legitimate government of China?

Established in 1912, the Republic of China (ROC) covered much of mainland China. In 1945, at the end of World War II (1945), the Republic of China added the island groups of Formosa (Taiwan) and the Pescadores (Penghu) to its authority. Four years later, the Chinese revolution began. This revolution was accompanied by significant political changes. The first of them was the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the mainland by the Chinese Communist Party led by Chairman Mao. The second biggest change was that the revolution saw the defeated Kuomintang (Nationalist) forces flee to the island of Taiwan where they maintained jurisdiction over Taiwan, Pescadores, Kinmen, Matsu, and numerous other islets, and declared themselves to be the rightful ruler of the whole of China. Since then, the two sides of the Taiwan Strait have been governed as separate territories and developed separate identities.

From the beginning of the Cold War until the early 1970s, the ROC was recognised by most Western countries as the sole legitimate government of China, though it ruled only over Taiwan and outlying islands (Pescadores, Kinmen, and Matsu). Taipei's argument was that the ROC

established on the mainland in 1912, with its seat in Nanking had only temporarily moved its government to the island province of Taiwan following the communists' illegal seizure of power in 1949 (Geldenhuys, 1995:7). Subsequently, the ROC occupied the seat for China in the United Nations and the United States seventh fleet stood in the way of any attempts by the PRC to complete their revolution by uniting Taiwan with the rest of mainland China (Suttner, 1996).

In the 1960s, upset by the rule of the mainland minority, some native Taiwanese began to call for independence from China. From there, their focus shifted from reclaiming the mainland to developing the island itself. It was also at the same period that the United States and other Western countries began to improve their relations with the PRC as a way to prevent Soviet expansionism. As a result, the ROC began to lose these recognitions in favour of the PRC. Furthermore, in 1972, the United Nations expelled Taipei's nationalist government in favour of Beijing's. Eight years later, the United States formally recognised the PRC, severing diplomatic relations with Taiwan (Geldenhuys, 1995:7; Breytenbach, 1994:54). In so doing, they accepted Beijing's 'one China' mandate and abandoned, at least officially, their defence pact with the island (Lasater, 1988:100-101). Following the United States, many other Western countries also turned their back on the island.

Divided since the end of a civil war in 1949, Beijing and Taipei have battled for political influence in the international arena. But after the expulsion of Taiwan from the United Nations in 1971, a number of countries have ceased to recognise its sovereignty. In 1996, only 30 countries in the world maintained their recognition of Taiwan, South Africa being politically the most important.

The ROC established diplomatic relations with South Africa in 1977 when both were regarded as pariah states by the international community, with Taiwan having been kicked out of the United Nations in 1971, South Africa having suffered the same fate earlier because of its racial policies. Since then, Taiwan had provided substantial assistance to South Africa and its firms continued to invest in business ventures. It also made direct contributions to the ANC as a political organisation in the struggle against apartheid.

The end of apartheid brought South Africa's long years of international isolation to an end. A number of states were now keen to enter into official relations with the new democratic South



Africa. Among them was the PRC on the mainland. However, until that time, no state had succeeded to maintain diplomatic links with both the PRC and the ROC; Beijing insisted that a choice be made (Geldenhuys, 1995:4). Hence, South Africa, like many other countries before, had to choose between maintaining its ties with the ROC, a product of their common ostracism, and recognising the PRC as the sole legitimate government of the entire China, Taiwan being a part of it.

According to John Daniel (1995), the "nuts and bolts" of the dilemma that the Government of National Unity was facing ran along three lines:

- Should South Africa retain its official ties to an old ally (albeit one linked to the previous apartheid regime) with whom it had since 1990 developed a close and economically advantageous relationship; an ally which, moreover, had in the last decade, like South Africa itself, undergone a dramatic and far-reaching democratisation process?
- Or should it abandon, or rather downgrade, its ties to that ally in favour of a government with a wretched (and deteriorating) 'human rights' record but which is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and home to some one-fifth of all humanity and therefore a market of immense proportions, made yet more important by the fact that its economy is currently the world's fastest growing?
- Or was there perhaps a third way, namely, that of dual recognition?

When President Mandela came to power, his message with regard to the 'two Chinas' question was one of tolerance, pragmatism and in the spirit of universalism. "He laid emphasis on the importance of existing and future economic links, and added that the ANC would not abandon its friends who helped during the days when we needed assistance" (Barber, 2004:106). At the same time, President Mandela also made it clear that, as the government, the ANC would never turn its back on Beijing. "It's unthinkable", he told a press conference, "that we can abandon relations with the People's Republic of China" (Barber, 2004:106). Taking this into consideration, one can surmise that for President Mandela, the best way to deal with the 'two Chinas' question was that of dual recognition. Barber comments that President Mandela thought that South Africa could succeed where other states such as Burkina Faso had failed, because of its special status from the

struggle against apartheid; the political miracle at home; its powerful position in Africa, and the international standing both of the government and Mandela himself. However, the PRC insisted that they would not countenance a dual recognition policy. For them, there was only one China: the PRC, with Taiwan being a part of it which would in time be fully reintegrated into it.

As already mentioned above, the relationship between South Africa and Taiwan had been forged in adversity, as they were drawn together by their pariah status. For the National Party government, there had been nothing to lose and something to gain in the relationship. There was no possibility of the PRC establishing relations with the apartheid regime, whereas, in contrast, Taipei was excited to create links, and was prepared to offer substantial economic benefits in return. In 1993, it was South Africa's sixth largest trading partner; their total trade amounted to R6,1 billion, with a surplus of R2,3 billion in South Africa's favour, compared with 1,6 billion for the PRC. By 1994, it had already invested some R1,4 billion in South Africa, creating over 40000 jobs in over 280 factories. Taiwanese trade mission concluded agreements for trade, investment, technical cooperation and financial assistance totalling R1,1 billion, with the prospect of more to come, including support for the petro-chemical plant at Mossel Bay (Geldenhuys, 1995:14).

Repeating the ANC's commitment to universalism, President Mandela maintained his position and stated that it would be immoral to cut off diplomatic ties with Taiwan. In February 1995, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alfred Nzo, confirmed the links with Taipei and added that: "This was a matter which should be resolved by the Chinese themselves" (Barber, 2004:107). However, as Barber affirms, the dual recognition never gained whole-hearted support either in the ANC, or the government, even at cabinet level. Its opponents believed that the policy was against South Africa's interests. They pointed to the PRC's great size and potential power, to the already strained relations with it, and to the hurdles it would create for Pretoria's future ambitions. As an example, they stated that if South Africa had hopes of playing a prominent role in the UN, it could not afford to offend the PRC, one of the 'big five' in the Security Council. Supporters of the switch also stressed the fact that the economic equation was changing in favour of the PRC. In the long term, they added, the PRC, with its vast population, its recently impressive economic growth and its increasing participation in global activities, had the potential to become a major world economic player.

At this stage, South Africa-PRC relations were semi-official with each country operating through informal representative offices in the other's capital. Despite their low-key nature, a two-way trade and aid relationship had developed involving, on the South African side, such major actors as Volkswagen, South Africa Breweries and ISCOR, China being its most lucrative market for iron (Daniel, 1995:161). Furthermore, the PRC had reached agreement with Britain to take over control of Hong Kong from July 1997. This was very important for the GNU because Hong Kong already had long-standing links with South Africa. In terms of trade, for example, even though these were smaller than those with Taiwan, when added to those with the PRC they were greater. Already in 1995, their combined total made them South Africa's fifth most important trading partner (R6,478m), while Taiwan was eighth (R5,774m). Also important were Hong Kong's investments in South Africa, which, following Japan, were the second largest from Asia (Barber, 2004:107). Advocates of the switch position argued that this represented no more than a drop in the ocean and that the lack of full diplomatic relations was hampering the full development of South Africa's trade potential with China. In his report to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee, Raymond Suttner (quoted in Daniel, 1995:173) mentioned the concerns of the South African Consul-General in Hong Kong and his anxiety that South Africa's relations with Hong Kong be regularised in order to safeguard South African interests with regard to trade, landing rights and the future of the consulate. Yet President Mandela seemed unmoved. In October 1996, he restated that it would be immoral to break ties with Taiwan. In the language of IR theory, therefore, promoting a strongly idealist position by insisting on the importance of morality in international relations.

The surprise came in November 1996 when President Mandela abruptly announced that in a year's time, Pretoria would cut its diplomatic ties with Taiwan and establish formal relations with Beijing. According to a number of commentators, Mandela's decision to break off diplomatic relations with the ROC was motivated by material interests. One of these commentators is Barber who states that Mandela's change of direction came about because the PRC's unflinching stand forced him to recognise that South Africa's interests were best served by abandoning the old policy, that is dual recognition (2003:107-108). Beijing, he says, made clear that when it took over from the British those who did not have full diplomatic relations with the PRC could expect no sympathy in negotiating their links with Hong Kong.

The triumph of pragmatism over principle is just a confirmation of what the then deputy minister of Foreign Affairs, Aziz Pahad, had previously said. He once declared that the country's foreign policy would be “pragmatic and interest-driven, and that its international priorities would be dictated by the need to ensure the success of the government's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) by securing foreign resources as swiftly as possible” (Breytenbach, 1994:55). The evidence of this is given by Barber (2003:107) who reveals that three weeks before the transfer of power in Hong Kong, the Chinese agreed, in negotiations with Aziz Pahad, that Pretoria could retain its mission in Hong Kong, that South African citizens could visit there without visas, that South African Airways could both retain its landing rights and in future could overfly mainland China to shorten the flight to Japan.

South Africa-Hong Kong relations represented an important factor that, according to Daniel (1995:172-173), influenced President Mandela's decision. Writing two years before the announcement, Daniel believed that the dual recognition was both the morally correct position in human rights terms as well as, conveniently, the one in South Africa's best economic interests, given the importance of Taiwan-South Africa trade relations, and also the fact that at the time Hong Kong was separated from the PRC. But, as he pointed it out, that could change if the PRC were to put the squeeze on South Africa by making all economic transactions subject to political criteria, i.e., recognition. As already explained above, the PRC made clear that those who did not have full diplomatic relations with them could expect no sympathy in negotiating their links with Hong Kong when it took over from British. Taking this into consideration, Daniel concluded that there could be no getting away from the fact that if South Africa reversed its position over the two Chinas, it would, under the present political circumstances in the two countries, represent a triumph of pragmatism over principle; moral principles would have been subordinated to hoped-for material gains. This is confirmed by Alden and le Pere (2003:21) who assert that “when Chinese President Jiang Zemin visited South Africa in 2000, official government statements focused only on bilateral trade and commercial interests, and that Pretoria and Beijing form one of South Africa's closest relationships with a non-African country through active engagement in process such the China-Africa Ministerial Forum and substantive investment in each other's economies”.

The above suggests that in the 'two Chinas' question, President Mandela was more concerned about South Africa's interests than anything else. In doing so, he acted in a characteristically realist way. The realist approach to international relations is, as we saw in chapter two, based on the assumptions that, within an anarchic international system, states are the main actors, and power the central concept. Although other actors are involved, for realists states remain the dominant players, and although they vary greatly in size, strength and capacity all pursue their national interests in a constant search for security and prosperity (Barber, 2003:93).

Realism emphasises states' demands for more power, security and the dangers to states' survival. Material power is the most important thing in international politics (Keohane and Nye, 1989:247). In neorealist theory, power is defined as a combined capability of a state (Waltz, 2000:1533), which includes not only its military force, but also its economic and technologic strength. Seen from this angle, material power and the pursuit of material interests become very important because they both affect national power and capability. The point made by them is that states are self-interested oriented and will cooperate with other states only to increase their interests and power.

Taking into account the above, one can assume that in choosing the option which allowed South Africa to strive for material power and influence in the international system, President Nelson Mandela seemed to have acted in a realist manner. The pursuit of economic interests is confirmed by Spence (2001:4-5) who declares that during the last years of Mandela's presidency a strong force of pragmatism ran through the formulation and conduct of foreign policy. A major preoccupation of Mandela administration's foreign policy, Spence adds, had been to weld the country's economy into a global market which rewards liberalisation and deregulation and penalises rigidity, inflexibility in the labour market and continued state control over particular assets. South Africa then realised that its foreign policy should demonstrate a commitment to an economic strategy that conformed to external expectations, leading to the adoption of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution programme (GEAR).

By behaving in a pragmatic manner in the case of the 'two Chinas' question, President Mandela acted in a way that was contrary to South Africa's stated foreign policy principles, which, as stated above, were clearly idealist driven. While it is true that it makes no sense for any country

to deny the *de jure* existence of a great power that holds a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, has the world's largest population, possesses a nuclear capability, and boasts one of the fastest growing economies in the world (Geldenhuys, 1995:4), respect for international law and human rights, and the promotion of democracy worldwide were some of South Africa's foreign policy principles that, if respected, could have helped the GNU to handle the relations with the two contending Chinese states and, therefore, prevented President Nelson Mandela for being criticised for a lack consistency.

In the interest of emphasising the point, a number of reasons can be raised to demonstrate that the way President Mandela chose to handle the 'two Chinas' question was incompatible with South Africa's idealist foreign policy principles. Firstly, Mandela's decision was in sharp contrast to the respect for human rights. In its foreign policy blueprint, dated December 1994, the ANC declared that it would “canonise human rights in our international relations”, and that South Africa “should and must play a central role” in a “worldwide human rights campaign”. Furthermore, South Africa under ANC rule would be neither selective nor afraid “to raise human rights violations with countries where our own and other interests might be negatively affected” (Geldenhuys, 1995:5). China, in contrast, has a human rights record that remains an injury to all those who fight for the respect of human dignity around the world. By deciding to recognise the PRC, President Mandela turned his back on what constituted the cornerstone of his foreign policy, namely human rights. The shift in South Africa's foreign policy was confirmed in March 1997 when President Mandela, during his first official tour of Southeast Asia, refused to abjure ties with countries that had poor human rights records, stating that South Africa's foreign policy would not be 'influenced by the differences which exist between the internal policies of a particular country and ourselves ... There are countries where there are human rights violations, but these countries have been accepted by the United States, the Commonwealth of Nations and by the Non-Aligned Movement . Why should we let ourselves depart from what international organisations are doing? (South Africa Press Association, 6 March 1997).

Secondly, with regard to democracy, even though Taiwan's political system had been undeniably authoritarian and dealt harshly with opposition, it lacked the brutal totalitarian features of the PRC's communist order. In 1987, the ROC initiated a process of political liberalisation with the lifting of martial law (declared in 1949). This ended the ban on the formation of new political

parties and abolished various other restrictions on free political activity. These changes preceded the so-called third wave of democratisation unleashed by the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War (Geldenhuys, 1995:9). Geldenhuys concludes that, contrary to the PRC, which is one of the few remaining communist dictatorships in the world, the ROC already possessed many of the attributes that are commonly associated with a stable liberal democracy, such as a high literacy rate, a high standard of living and a largely homogeneous population.

As has been outlined above, a principled commitment to democracy and respect for human rights was the essence, if not the totality, of President Mandela's foreign policy (Nathan, 2005:364). In the case of the 'two Chinas' policy, these principles were clearly not allowed. This was, however, not the only instance during Mandela's presidency where there appeared to be an inconsistency between his foreign policy rhetoric and actions. Alongside the 'two Chinas' policy are other examples of inconsistency. They include South Africa's controversial arms acquisition programme, which entailed the purchase of warships and aircraft at the cost estimated at R30 billion (US \$5.2 billion) in 1998, and its arms sales to Syria and Indonesia (Spence, 2001), programmes that were at odds with its holistic approach to security and the pacific foreign posture that it was supposed to follow; the military intervention by South Africa and Botswana in Lesotho in September 1998, which was incoherent with Pretoria's preference for pacific forms of conflict resolution; the government's slowness to deal with the widespread xenophobia in South Africa which targeted mainly people from other African countries, attitude that was contrary to its emphasis on Africa (Nathan, 2005:370); and South Africa's ties with countries with a record of human rights violations such as Libya and Cuba, relations that altogether were in clear contrast with the respect of human dignity that it was supposed to promote.

In their analysis of South Africa's foreign policy under Mandela, Alden and le Pere, Johnston, Hamill, and Kodjo further these inconsistencies. Alden and le Pere (2003:19) declare that "in the implementation of foreign policy, financial, commercial, political, and defence interests supplanted the new government's cautiously crafted ethical dimension... More often than not, this produced realist and pragmatic responses where a critical and principled position might have been more prudent". The examples they cite to illustrate this include the conflict between East Timor and Indonesia; South Africa's relations with Malaysia; the political crisis in Zaire in 1997;

the military intervention in Lesotho in 1998; and the controversial arms sales. In all of these cases, Mandela acted in a realist manner, privileging national interests and the use of force.

For Spence, “the major preoccupation of the post-apartheid foreign policy has been to weld South Africa's economy into a global marketplace which rewards liberalisation and deregulation and penalises rigidity, inflexibility in the labour market and continued state control over particular assets” (2001:5). This, Spence explains, was due to the fact that the post-apartheid government was facing many economic challenges, including battered sanctions, negative rates of growth, high unemployment and an ever-increasing large burden of public debt. The new regime had therefore to find ways to create an environment that could help it to further its economic interests in order to reverse the situation in which it found itself. This idea is also shared by Kodjo (1999:184-185) who argues that South Africa's desire to cooperate with its neighbours and other African countries was motivated by its desire to further its economic interests. Thus, President Nelson Mandela became a kind of representative of South African farmers and businessmen in Africa. Ahwireng-Obeng and McGowan (2001) seem to corroborate this hegemonic role in their article entitled “Partner or Hegemon? South Africa in Africa”. Johnston also calls into question the Mandela government's commitment to issues involving a human rights dimension. He notes that while the South African Government's *Discussion Document on Foreign Policy* raises issues of human rights and democracy with salience, it provides neither adequate justification nor an explicit framework for the management of such issues in practice.

Hamill's scepticism comes from the contradiction existing between the principles and the culture prevailing in the ANC-led administration. To illustrate this contradiction, he cites the Defence Ministry. In the early years of the post-apartheid regime, Hamill declares, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) hierarchy and its political masters stressed the need for strong armed forces equipped and ready to meet a conventional military threat from within the region. The then Defence Minister, Joe Modise, stated in 1994 that 'Peace is the ideal situation but ideal situations are hard to find in the real world. Modise's statement followed the one made by President Nelson Mandela himself two weeks after his inauguration, when he proclaimed that he saw nothing wrong in arms sales which, according to him, were for the purpose of defending the sovereignty and the integrity of a country. For Hamill, these two statements were clearly based



on the realist principle of self-defence which is contrary to the collective defence advocated by idealists.

Although the general trend of his foreign policy was idealist, President Mandela clearly did not consistently act according to idealist principles. This, however, is not to say that under his presidency South Africa's actions at the international level were consistently inconsistent with its foreign policy principles. A number of examples do show that on several occasions President Mandela tried to stick to these principles. One of them is his call for sanctions to be imposed on the dictatorship regime in Nigeria in 1995.

The political crisis in Nigeria in 1995 was, as Alden and le Pere (2003:21) declare, one of the most serious and potentially explosive challenges to confront the new South African government, testing the ANC's foreign policy ideals and objectives in a very palpable and public way. The crisis began in 1993 when the head of the regime, General Ibrahim Babangida, annulled the results of the presidential elections which the opposition candidate Chief Moshhood Abiola was widely believed to have won. One year later, Abiola was jailed for treason by General Sani Abacha, Babangida's dictatorial successor. Things got worse in November 1995 when, without warning, Sani Abacha executed Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni minority-rights activists. These events put South Africa in a complicated situation. The GNU had to choose between allying itself with Nigeria's regime from which the ANC received a lot of support during its struggle against apartheid or in the name of 'African Solidarity' and disapproving it to be in line with two of its foreign policy principles namely democracy and the respect of human rights. President Mandela chose the second option. He expressed his indignation at a Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Auckland, New Zealand, and called for tougher measures including the expulsion of Nigeria from the Commonwealth and the imposition of an oil embargo.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

From the above, we can conclude that those who portray President Mandela's foreign policy as idealist are advancing a simplistic understanding of what was a much complex, at times contradictory foreign policy. It is true that under his presidency Pretoria did have a foreign policy that was, on paper, idealist-driven, but a closer look at some of his actions such as the 'two

Chinas' policy reveals a number of inconsistencies which make the classification of him as either idealist or realist difficult. Addressing the seemingly contradictory foreign policy priorities became an overriding objective of his successor Thabo Mbeki.

## **CHAPTER 4**

# **SOUTH AFRICA'S FOREIGN POLICY UNDER PRESIDENT THABO MVUYELWA MBEKI (1999-2008)**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter intends to explore South Africa's foreign policy under President Mbeki, with the intension of showing that critics who view it as fundamentally realist and limited to the advancement of national interests are mistaken. It begins with an overview of the principles upon which Mbeki's foreign policy was based. It then analyses, in the light of IR theory, South Africa's policy of 'quiet diplomacy' towards Zimbabwe. Finally, it responds to the question whether Mbeki's foreign policy was mainly realist-driven as it is understood by some critics.

### **4.2 South Africa's Foreign Policy Principles under President Mbeki**

“While the initial period after the South African election of April 1994 may be seen with hindsight as something of a honeymoon phase in the Republic's relations with the international community, the need to develop a cogent foreign policy more reliant on process than personalities and driven less by single events than broad trends became increasingly acute” (Mills, 2000:299). The post-Mandela government was aware of the fact that “five years after the ‘miracle’ of the transition, things that concerned a largely impoverished and somewhat disillusioned but patient electorate exercising democratic rights for only the second time in their history were overwhelmingly domestic. Jobs, housing, public utilities, education, health, and crime were the matters that South Africans cared about now that the high political questions of state legitimacy and constitution-making had been resolved” (Evans, 1999:621-622). These and other factors have since then, as le Pere and van Nieuwkerk (2006:287-288) declare, “exacerbated a number of negative social trends, such as a spiraling crime and corruption as well as serious social disparities not only between black and white, but also between the newly enriched black middle class and a poor, mostly uneducated black minority, as well as between urban and rural households”.

Though domestic issues dominated the June 1999 elections, South Africa's international relations would have a direct bearing on the ability of Pretoria's second post-apartheid administration to deliver its electoral pledges. As Evans (1999:622) pointed out, “global economic enmeshing had proceeded at such a pace that what goes on outside the territorial boundaries of the state often conditions what can be achieved within them”. Incoming president Thabo Mbeki was aware that five years down the road from apartheid, the inescapable priority for South Africa was domestic reconstruction and economic growth allied to internal social and political stability. For that specific reason, South Africa's international profile over the next five years had to generate tangible material pay-offs. Tracing the evolution of the ANC's international stance from its founding in 1912 to the 1994 elections, and exploring the foreign policy positions open to the Mbeki's administration, Evans predicted that the Mbeki's administration would have to embrace the repertoire of *realpolitik*, that is to say a realist foreign policy which gives special importance to material gains.

In his address to the ANC national conference in Mafikeng on 15 December 1997 Thabo Mbeki, talking to outgoing ANC president, Nelson Mandela, declared: “*I will never, ever be seen dead in your shoes, because you always wear ugly shoes*” (address to the ANC national conference, 15 December 1997). Coming from the new head of ANC, this message indicated that the incoming president was determined to create his own image. Both at home and internationally, the need to separate himself from his larger-than-life predecessor became one of the driving forces of Mbeki's reign (Gumede, 2007:63).

A state's foreign policy should produce a climate both at home and abroad in which its people can feel at ease with themselves and their country's role in world affairs (Spence, 2001:9). Throughout the presidency of Nelson Mandela, the general critiques of his administration converged around the strategic ambiguities and uncertain approaches underpinning South Africa's foreign policy. As was highlighted in the previous chapter, there was a palpable tension between prioritising its perceived commercial, trade and political interests and its role as a moral crusader in the promotion of global human rights and democracy (le Pere and van Nieuwkerk, 2006). However, as le Pere and van Nieuwkerk observe, following the second post-apartheid election in June 1999, which saw President Mbeki securing overwhelming political control in the

hands of the ANC, with himself and a close circle of colleagues at the helm of policy-making, this ambiguity and uncertainty was replaced by a stronger sense of purpose and vision.

Upon taking office, President Mbeki and his cabinet approved a new integrated planning framework to guide the strategic national priorities identified by the executive. This framework resulted from an International Relations, Peace and Security strategic plan that emerged from a DFA Heads of Mission conference held in February 2001. The document highlighted four mutually reinforcing themes representing the South African government's key foreign-policy objectives, namely: South Africa's domestic interests; the objectives of the African renaissance; promoting an agenda for the South, and developing an equitable global system (Alden and le Pere, 2003:31-32).

The idea of an African Renaissance was not new, it borrowed from several earlier calls for an African revival from leaders such as Nkwame Nkrumah from Ghana, Julius Kambarage Nyerere from Tanzania, and Kenneth David Kuanda from Zambia (Vale and Masseko, 1998:286). Since its appearance in Thabo Mbeki's parliamentary address in June 1997, the idea of an African Renaissance has increasingly assumed an iconic status in South African public life. Mbeki, then deputy president, reminded his audience of the 'obligation to contribute to the common African continental effort, at last; to achieve an African Renaissance, including the establishment of stable democracies, respect for human rights, an end to violent conflicts, and a better life for all peoples of Africa (Lodge, 1999:96). Since 1999, this idea has become an important pillar of Mbeki's foreign policy and a key orientation of his administration. This foreign policy principle emphasised the centrality of the African continent in South African foreign policy, and outlined the critical role of South Africa as an intermediary between the African continent and leading foreign powers in the rest of the world (Schraeder, 2001:233).

With regard to the promotion of an agenda for the South and the development of an equitable global system, President Mbeki identified a number of issues that would be considered as the country's main concerns. These include the OAU/African Union (AU) and SADC's restructuring; the reform of regional and international organisations such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the Commonwealth; South Africa's hosting of major international conferences; efforts at promoting

peace and security in Africa and the Middle East; and an analysis of how South Africa's foreign policy priorities and goals were shaped and influenced by its bilateral relations. At the same time, President Mbeki stressed the importance of South Africa's relations with the G8 group of states, and envisaged a 'G8 of the South', new strategic partnerships with selected African states and improved cooperation (Alden and le Pere, 2003:32).

In order to achieve these foreign policy goals, "South Africa's foreign policy makers had to reach a general understanding of the issues on which decisions would be based. In bureaucratic terms, this meant the establishment of a clear chain of command in which there would be an acceptance of South Africa's role in the international community, and of the evolving nature of that community" (Mills, 2000:300). In this logic, President Mbeki made several changes to the existing national bureaucracy, which, altogether, resulted in the centralisation of the foreign policy decision-making body in the president's office (le Pere and van Nieuwkerk, 2006:289).

These modifications in South Africa's foreign policy have led to the conclusion that Mbeki's foreign policy was driven by realist principles. This view is found in papers written by a number of commentators, including Butler, Hlela, Williams, and Hughes. The former declares that under Thabo Mbeki's tutelage, external strategy has embraced a more pragmatic and limited conception of international politics (2004:156-157). Butler argues that when he came to power in 1999, President Mbeki acknowledged the fact that the central problem facing all African states was their progressive marginalisation in the international economy. "Economic development elsewhere had lifted hundreds of millions out of the despair of poverty in the past two decades, and could continue to improve the lots of still more numerous millions in China, India and Latin America in coming decades. To prevent this from happening in their borders, African leaders had to adopt policies that could help them to participate in this economic order, to attract investment, to trade, and to become part of the value adding supply chains that make up the international economy". In Butler's opinion, the Mbeki government's actions implied that it had registered this priority and that it had fully embraced the fundamental role of foreign policy, namely advancing business interest. This seems to suggest that for Butler, Mbeki's foreign policy was formulated only in the pursuit or advancement of the country's national interest rather than in the pursuit or advancement of beliefs and core values.

National interest<sup>6</sup> was, according to Hlela (2002:163), the main focus in South Africa's foreign policy under the apartheid regime. At that time, the country's foreign policy also served to further the interest of the West in Africa. When South Africa was emancipated in 1994, the emphasis in Pretoria's foreign policy shifted from Europe to Africa and away from the distant power blocs of the northern hemisphere to the neighbouring states of the southern African region. Accordingly, the government developed a foreign policy reflective of its new political dispensation, a foreign policy that could help it work with, and integrate itself with the rest of Africa. Upon assuming office, Thabo Mbeki adopted the same philosophy as his predecessor. For him, not only was South Africa expected to lead and inspire a renewal of continental fortunes, but it was also expected to play a major part in projecting the cause of the developing world in the Non-Aligned Movement and elsewhere (Mills, 2000:308).

Despite these aspirations, though, South Africa's foreign policy under Mbeki was, according to Hlela, still formed by national interest as it was under the apartheid regime (2002:164). For him, the Mbeki administration's dedication to becoming a real partner in Africa and supporting regional economic development process was purely motivated by economic logic and political solidarity. It is true, he admits, that there have been instances when South Africa's foreign policy has been characterised by indecisiveness, but this, he maintains, could be attributed to different assessments of the country's national interest, assessments which reflect the divergent needs of the component parts of the South African political economy.

Hlela's viewpoint echoes what Mills says. Mills declares that while the Mandela presidency was characterised by the need for reconciliation, transformation, policy development and the blanket policy response of universalism, Mbeki's tenure needed to display less prevarication and more policy implementation (2000:350). In an era of increasing demands on their time and energies, leadership needed to concentrate their efforts and resources to pursue those issues which best could serve the national interest. In other words, leadership needed to develop an interest-based foreign policy, a foreign policy aimed primarily at economic growth and reducing unemployment.

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<sup>6</sup> Hlela defines national interest as that which makes up the state's most vital needs: self-preservation, independence, territorial integrity, military security and economic well-being.

The achievement of such goals demanded, as Mills explains, the implementation of strategies geared to taking maximum advantage of South Africa's strengths in the global and regional economies. In the global arena, this amounted to securing access to economic resources and arguing for preferential trade and investment/aid terms. Regional interests hinged on the potential economic value to South Africa of the continent. Knowing that none of these ambitions could be achieved in an environment characterised by instability and economic decline, the new foreign policy making body adopted a new mission statement which, as noted above, was to enhance South Africa's international capability to ensure its sovereignty and security and promote its policies aimed at furthering the African renaissance, the creation of wealth and the improvement of the quality of life of all its citizens. In this process of revival, President Mbeki underscored the importance of foreign investment and the need to establish conditions enabling long-term investments in the continent. In this way, Mills concludes, rather than relying on African standards and (past) excuses, the renaissance was about making African economies competitive in a global context; it was about making the continent safe to do business. The government's adoption of 'security and wealth creation' as the DFA's new leitmotif and fundamental purpose seems to confirm this belief.

The promotion of 'security and wealth creation' is amongst the reasons put forward in classifying Mbeki's foreign policy as realist. The primary political dilemma of the ANC involves balancing their commitments to domestic transformation with the pressures of an increasingly globalised economy where the sanctions for stepping out of line ideologically are severe (Williams, 2000:73). Integrating South Africa's foreign policy with domestic policies and capabilities was one of the hallmarks of the search for a post-Mandela approach to international relations. Although the country dominated the Southern African region economically, in global terms however it remained a middle-income economy with a medium human-development ranking on the UN Development Programme's index. Moreover, since 1994, unemployment rates have grown, social problems such as crime and corruption have increased, and there are serious disparities between the population groups (Alden and le Pere, 2003:28).

In response to these domestic socio-economic challenges, the government adjusted its earlier Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which focused on poverty reduction and meeting basic needs of those most disadvantaged. This led to the adoption in 1996 of a new



economic policy named Growth, Employment, and Redistribution Programme (GEAR). GEAR was aimed to attract foreign investors, stimulate 6% annual growth, and create 400 000 jobs a year. In 1999, oncoming president Mbeki and his cabinet endorsed the GEAR programme as framework to deliver their electoral pledges. *"We are absolutely committed to the implementation of the plan, simply because there are no viable alternatives"*, Mbeki said (Corrigan, 1999:42).

The shift from RDP to GEAR had significant implications for South Africa's foreign policy, since getting the economic fundamentals right implied to improve global competitiveness and export efficiency as well as inspire confidence amongst foreign investors (Alden and the le Pere, 2003:28-29). These two authors comment that under Mbeki, the government decided to engage more earnestly and vigorously with the forces of globalisation as a means of improving economic growth, generating employment and addressing inequality. In this sense, GEAR was seen as key for achieving the developmental goals that, for a variety of reasons, the RDP had failed to deliver. Towards this end, the DFA distilled the government's commitments down to two primary objectives: security and wealth creation. The former was to be achieved through the promotion of compliance with international law and active engagement in conflict resolution, the latter through a co-ordinated approach to globalisation, the enhancement of South Africa's image abroad, and vigorous pursuit of trade and investment (Department of Foreign Affairs, Thematic Reviews/Strategic Planning (Pretoria: DFA, 1999). As the then Director-General of foreign affairs, Jackie Selebi, argued in 1999, the idea was to make South Africa's foreign policy "predictable" and not one that suggested we collide with events (Mills, 2000:300).

The promotion of 'security and wealth creation' by the DFA is viewed by Paul Williams as the government's approval of the principles enshrined in the realist paradigm. He points out two main reasons to justify his position. First, related to security, Williams (2000:78) observes that there remained a notable reliance on the 'national interest', 'regional threats', and a militaristic approach to peacekeeping and conflict resolution.

Against this backdrop, there remained, as Williams remarks, a heavy emphasis on addressing, and preparing for, military combat. From Williams' remarks, one can conclude that the government's approach to security was based on the realist principle of self-help. As mentioned

in chapter two, realists believe that the anarchic character of international system leads to a competition of one against all. Considering the survival of the state as the most important thing, they maintain that material power, particularly military force, should be the main concern of the state.

With regard to wealth creation, Williams comments that “official appeals to focus on wealth generation have been widely interpreted as meaning that foreign policy makers should listen more intently to the voices of (both foreign and local) big business than other groups. The positions advocated by South Africa's largest corporations and their numerous intellectual apologists have often been interpreted as being synonymous with the best route to wealth creation” (2000:79). This suggests that the general trend amongst the new foreign policy makers is to view foreign policy as interest-based. This is confirmed by Hlela (2002:166) who maintains that the business community too played a significant role under President Mbeki in the formulation of foreign policy. As an example to illustrate this, he cites the case of the DRC where the “DFA had to walk the tightrope of not appearing to compromise its role as a disinterested peace facilitator, but still to give South African companies ...the necessary back-up to secure their interests”. This is furthermore stressed by Moeletse Mbeki and Elizabeth Sidiropoulos (2008:2) who declare that in today's world of global interdependence, the national interest (to make a better life for all and more specifically in the South Africa case to create more jobs, more prosperity and less poverty) is about the pursuit of economic interests at the regional and international level. In the South African context, economic interests, they conclude, manifest themselves as the interests of business—both big and small.

An understanding of South Africa's foreign policy under Thabo Mbeki also requires an understanding of the institution in charge of its formulation. Hughes (2004:15) declares that one of the defining issues of the Mbeki presidency, and one that was core to an understanding of the conduct of key areas of South Africa's foreign policy, was the strengthening of the office of the State President. As noted above, in order to achieve the country's new goals, South Africa's foreign policy makers had to reach a general understanding of the issues upon which decisions would be based. This necessitated the establishment of a new foreign policy team. Towards this end, President Mbeki made a number of changes that resulted in the centralisation of the foreign policy decision-making body in the president's office.

The above seems to suggest that the general trend amongst analysts is to view Mbeki's foreign policy as mainly realist-driven. We now turn to the question whether the policy of 'quiet diplomacy' towards Zimbabwe confirms this view.

#### **4.4 Interpreting Mbeki's Policy of 'Quiet Diplomacy' towards Zimbabwe**

The economic and political crisis that Zimbabwe is facing currently has reached an unbearable point. More intolerable has been South African former President Thabo Mbeki's refusal to express disapproval of Robert Mugabe's growing authoritarianism and escalating violations of human rights. This raises questions related to how can one explain President Mbeki's policy of 'quiet diplomacy' towards Zimbabwe and whether this policy was in line with the general thrust of his realist-driven foreign policy.

The occupation by war veterans of white-owned farms in February 2000 initiated a series of events leading up to the elections in June 2000. The outcome of the March 2000 referendum on constitutional reforms also contributed to events leading up to Zimbabwe's troubled election. After the referendum, a series of economic and political crises erupted (van Wyk, 2002:95). Upset and fearing for his power, President Mugabe turned to violence. Since then, the country descended into decay, reducing the electorate to poor, starving, desperate people; easy to manipulate and overwhelm. The desperate population was mobilised into hate and destruction. Freedom was no more and violence on the farms increased. Democracy was trodden under the feet of people, a 'third force', resourced and directed to inflict crude justice, by kidnapping, beating, killing, torture, harassment of civilians or anybody who did not support and shout praises for Robert Mugabe and his ZANU-PF. Poverty, a destroyed economy, hunger and a bleak future drove many out of the country, including investors, doctors, nurses and professionals in all fields. Sovereignty became a license to force Zimbabwean people into subjugation, using 'third force' operating under the police, army and CIO (Central Intelligence Organisation) (Zunga, 2003:7).

In 2002, Zimbabwe was suspended from the Commonwealth on charges of its human rights abuses. This decision, however, was not supported unanimously. South African President, Thabo Mbeki, appealed to the Commonwealth to end Zimbabwe's suspension. Instead, President Mbeki and his cabinet opted for what they called 'quiet diplomacy' to deal with the political situation in

Zimbabwe. Since then, South Africa's image has suffered because of its alleged failure in respect to the situation in Zimbabwe. This brings us to the question of how to interpret Mbeki's policy of 'quiet diplomacy' towards Zimbabwe.

South Africa's decision to pursue a foreign policy of 'quiet diplomacy' should be understood within the context of Mbeki's vision of an African Renaissance. Under President Mbeki, the idea of the African Renaissance became an important pillar of South Africa's foreign policy and a key orientation of his administration. As a foreign policy principle, Schraeder (2001:233) declares, the African Renaissance stressed the centrality of the African continent in South African foreign policy, and outlined the critical role of South Africa as an intermediary between the African continent and leading foreign powers in the rest of the world.

Of all the crises facing southern Africa, that in Zimbabwe most directly affected South Africa's immediate interests and longer-term ambitions for continental leadership. Bound by geography, history and economics, the mounting political and economic calamities in Zimbabwe challenged the government in Pretoria to a greater degree than any other foreign policy issue. Pretoria's policy of 'quiet diplomacy' was designed to induce Mugabe to change his policies. It is informed by the principle of 'constructive engagement'<sup>7</sup> (Alden and le Pere, 2003:48). The principle of 'constructive engagement' assumes that governments are more likely to reform if they are treated with a mixture of contact and limited sanctions, rather than a blanket boycott or embargo (Johnston, 2001:21). In this logic, in 1998, answering a question about the conferral of honors on foreign leaders whose human rights records were allegedly dubious, President Mbeki said:

“The government is of the opinion that the most effective and constructive way to address human rights issues is to develop a result-oriented policy that promotes critical dialogue and not confrontation” (National Assembly, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998, in Corrigan, 1999:42).

With regard to the Zimbabwean crisis, his foreign minister, Dr Dlamini-Zuma, declared:

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<sup>7</sup> The term is attributed to the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Chester Crocker, to describe the Reagan administration's policy towards South Africa (Johnston, 2001:21).

“Zimbabwe remains of great concern to us. We have to continue to engage the Zimbabwean government whilst pointing out firmly and frankly where we disagree with them. We have a responsibility to avoid complete collapse and not to make things worse for ordinary Zimbabweans. All of us can help to a point but it is the Zimbabweans that must surely take final decisions...South Africa must continue to act in a way that maintains that flickering hope of transforming dreams into reality rather than get short term praise that does not solve the problem. In the same way that Lockerbie impasse was unlocked by engaging the Libyans and not condemning them. We were condemned at the time but we persevered until a solution was found” (van Wyk, 2002:111).

Despite its limited leverage over Zimbabwe, the South African government sought to mobilise diplomacy and economic instruments to bring about a resolution to the crisis. Isolating and acting against Mugabe, whose behavior as a rogue player within SADC threatened the organisation's unity, was not seen by Mbeki to be a viable option (Alden and le Pere, 2003:48). Towards this end, Alden and le Pere add, the Mbeki administration “ensured that the Zimbabwean economy continued to function through, for example, extraordinary extensions of credit in key sectors such as power, where its parastatal company, Eskom supplied the bulk of Zimbabwe's needs. Pretoria also acted as intermediary between the Bretton Woods institutions and Harare, and represented the concerns of both the government and business”.

However, the various attempts made by South Africa to promote dialogue between ZANU-PF and the MDC turned out to be unsuccessful. Zimbabwe plunged further into state-sponsored anarchy. As food shortages climbed and the potential for widespread famine increased, Zimbabweans became more and more frustrated over what they perceived as South Africa's complicity with Mugabe's government (Dempster, 2003). Moreover, Zimbabweans perceived South Africa's acceptance of the 2002 presidential elections as a tacit endorsement of Mugabe's violent actions (Hamill, 2002). Mbeki's failure to publicly condemn Mugabe and his public appearance, standing hand-in-hand with him, raised questions about the exact goals of South Africa's policy of ‘quiet diplomacy’ and also strengthened domestic and international opinions that Mbeki was condoning Mugabe's actions (Johnston, 2001).

In order to attempt an understanding of Mbeki's policy of 'quiet diplomacy', the constructivist approach to international relations can be employed. As we saw in chapter 2, norms are afforded an important role to the understanding of the world. They help define situations and hence influence international practice in a very significant way. Constructivism helps us to comprehend the situation that South Africa is facing, with regard to the political crisis in Zimbabwe. The introduction of new norms such as the respect of human rights and democracy, which originate from western culture, goes against some of the well-established norms in Africa, namely sovereignty and the fact to 'not speaking out against each other' (van der Westhuizen, 2004:30), or the idea of African solidarity. This, in turn, has placed South Africa in a very difficult situation and undermined President Mbeki's efforts to handle the political crisis in Zimbabwe. Framing new norms is essential to overcoming extrinsic and intrinsic constraints, but, as van der Westhuizen (2004:4) points out, the minimum extrinsic requirement is that an argument must be heard (securing an audience and assuring the credibility of the institution that advocates the norm), and intrinsic barriers include the fit with dominant belief systems, notions of identity and social institutions. This explains why constructivists believe that international organisations are important vehicles for teaching and diffusing norms that help constitute the national interests of states that adopt these norms (Finnemore, cited in Adler, 2002:103).

African leaders' failure to condemn President Mugabe's growing authoritarianism and human rights abuses is a testimony that Africa, on the whole, is not ready yet to adopt these new norms of human rights. This could also explain why President Mandela's call for tougher sanctions to be imposed on Nigeria in 1995 was not heeded; instead, his failure to galvanise support from other African leaders damaged the country's prestige and national pride, and cast it as 'pro-Western' and 'un-African' in the eyes of other African states (Olivier and Geldenhuys, 1997). As van der Westhuizen (2004) notes, "new norms will be adopted only if (the) proposed norm better fits with the kind of people that they are or would like to see themselves as". The case of Zimbabwe, together with many others, shows that the African states still have a long way to go before they accept the respect of human rights and democracy as principles of governance.

Seen from this perspective, Mbeki's policy of 'quiet diplomacy' towards Zimbabwe appears to have been totally in contradiction with the general thrust of his realist-driven foreign policy. Foreign policy issues such as Zimbabwe occupy a particular significant place for business given

its investment in the region, especially given the impact of the Zimbabwean contagion effect and the fact that business is itself constantly questioned about South Africa's policy towards Zimbabwe by their international counterparts (Hughes, 2004:39). Under Mbeki, the view of business has not always been taken into consideration. With regard to the crisis in Zimbabwe, for example, the South Africa Foundation issued a press release in which it declared the following:

“The South Africa Foundation calls for the unequivocal condemnation of the violent and destructive economic and political policies of the government of President Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe ...As host of the UN Summit and co-founder of NEPAD, South Africa must dissociate itself clearly and unambiguously from the disastrous policies being applied in Zimbabwe and reaffirm the rights and values enshrined in our own constitution. It is now clear that no external engagement with the government of Zimbabwe has prevented the implementation of catastrophic policies under the guise of land reform. Following the appeal by UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, concerted action is now required, in the interests of the people of Zimbabwe, the region as a whole and in order to enhance the goals of NEPAD” (Hughes, 2004:40).

In Hughes's opinion, this statement represents evidence of the fact that the business viewpoint was not positively responded to or that Mbeki's policy of ‘quiet diplomacy’ towards Zimbabwe was fundamentally at odds with the views and interests of South African business. By issuing this press release, Hughes goes on, the South Africa Foundation wanted to put pressure on Zimbabwe, but also, and more importantly, on the South African government and the President in particular to seize the moment, set a precedent and distance the country from the policies of the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

Given the above, we can say that Mbeki's foreign policy was far from being realist-driven as it seemed at first glance. As mentioned above, the primary political dilemma facing the ANC involves balancing their commitments to domestic transformation with the pressure of an

increasingly globalised economy. In order to guarantee the country's interests internationally and provide good service delivery at home, the post-Mandela government adopted in 1999 a new integrated planning framework to guide the strategic national priorities identified by the executive. This resulted not only in the reformulation of the DFA's vision and mission statement, but also in the reorganisation of the institution in charge of foreign policy formulation. Altogether, these transformations led to the conclusion that Mbeki's was mainly realist-driven. As highlighted by the Zimbabwe case study, however, a closer look at some of his actions reveals that President Mbeki's actions can also be conceived through a constructivist lenses.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Overview of the Findings

This study set out to investigate the foreign policies of presidents Mandela and Mbeki, with the intent of showing that the classification of them as, respectively, idealist and realist reflects simplistic understandings of the perspectives that inform these two statesmen. Mandela's response to the 'two Chinas' question and Mbeki's policy of 'quiet diplomacy' towards Zimbabwe were the two examples used as case studies to achieve this aim.

As stated at the outset, all discussions of international politics are based –either explicitly or implicitly– on theoretical assumptions. Based on the outline of theoretical tools provided in chapter 2, it was found that under President Mandela, South Africa's foreign policy was rhetorically driven by a number of values that are enshrined in the idealist paradigm. These values included the promotion of democracy worldwide, the respect for human rights and the rule of law, peace, and cooperation between states. The ANC's desire to enclose civil liberties and democracy originated from its struggle against the apartheid regime. The idea behind the adoption of these principles was to make both Africa and Southern Africa the principal theatre of South African activism, to promote regional development and to take part constructively in multilateral organisations.

However, what emerged from Mandela's response to the 'two Chinas' question is that the idealist rhetoric was not always consistently implemented in practice. In fact, Mandela sometimes seemed to be making foreign policy decisions that were contrary to the values that he was supposed to promote. In the case of the 'two Chinas' question, it was shown that President Mandela acted in a realist manner, putting material interests first. Like many other examples, the 'two Chinas' question highlighted the tensions between the country's idealist leanings and the realist imperatives of globalisation. In practice, considerations of financial, commercial, political and defence interests came to overtake the cautiously crafted ethical dimension in foreign policy. As a result of this, more often, instead of being guided by its principles, the tendency was to solve problems as and when they arose.

During Mandela's reign, the process of foreign policy formulation in South Africa had been subject to a complicated interaction of competing forces. Policy shifts of the post-apartheid era not only necessitated new structures but also new ideas for the future. The end of his presidency thus opened up more diplomatic room for the incoming administration at both institutional and ideational levels. At institutional level, it was shown that upon taking office, President Mbeki made several changes to the existing national bureaucratic and policy-making machinery. This exercise resulted, as we saw in chapter four, in the centralisation of the foreign policy decision-making body in the president's office.

At the ideational level, the research found that following Mbeki's inauguration in June 1999, several changes were observable in South Africa's foreign policy. This process of transformation began with the endorsement by the post-Mandela government of the GEAR programme as a framework to deliver its electoral pledges. One year later, the DFA embarked on a thorough strategic planning exercise in order to provide focus to its actions and to maximise the effectiveness of South African foreign policy.

It was also found that for a number of critics, this process of transformation that the DFA went through under President Mbeki was articulated in realist terms as advancing South Africa's national interest internationally. The reasons given by these critics to justify this conclusion, as we saw, were numerous, but in summary included the government's adoption in 1999 of the 'security and wealth creation' as the DFA's new leitmotif and fundamental purpose; the pre-eminence of the Presidency in matters of foreign policy agenda setting; as well as the alleged role of the business community in foreign policy formulation.

According to the realist understanding of foreign policy, a state will tend to protect, promote and maximise the perceived core interests of its country in its dealings with other countries, the international community or other international actors. An examination of Mbeki's policy of 'quiet diplomacy' towards Zimbabwe revealed, however, that South Africa's foreign policy under his reign was not purely realist-driven as it seemed at first glance. Mbeki's approach on Zimbabwe has been that of persuasion rather than the exercise of power.

## **5.2 Recent Developments**

Much of the conversation surrounding South Africa's policy towards Zimbabwe has been predicated on the belief that, as a regional power, South Africa has the capacity to exercise influence on its northern neighbour to bring about a desired change in policies. The failure to do so has raised a number of questions about the effectiveness of South Africa's desire to build a better Africa and a better world. Despite criticisms, President Mbeki maintained his position over Zimbabwe. His perseverance finally paid off on September 15 when, under his mediation, President Mugabe and his rival Tsvangirai signed the power-sharing deal which allowed the former to retain his office while making the latter the prime minister. Although, at the time this written, the two sides are still in the process of negotiating an equal distribution of key ministries and responsibilities for the sake of giving the deal a chance, the peace process seems to be getting under way in Zimbabwe.

The past few months have also seen South African politics in its most dramatic state since the end of apartheid in 1994. This resulted from the decision by the ANC's National Executive Committee to remove Thabo Mbeki from office and Mbeki's subsequent resignation on 21 September 2008. On Thursday, 25 September, ANC deputy President was sworn in as South Africa's caretaker president.

With these changes in government, and the upcoming national election in 2009, there has been much speculation about what changes this will bring to the country's policies, including its foreign policy. This uncertainty finds its importance in the fact that Kgalema Motlanthe, the current President, and the ANC's leader Jacob Zuma seem to be informed by different perspectives. Upon taking office, the former offered assurances that the government would maintain its economic policies, while placing a renewed focus on reducing poverty and fighting crime. In addition to this, Motlanthe decided to keep in their posts a number of ministers from the outgoing government, including the Finance minister Trevor Manuel. This is an indication that under his reign, South Africa's foreign policy is likely to be a continuation of Mbeki's foreign policy. Jacob Zuma, on the contrary, has been one of those who have publicly criticised the ousted President for his policies, including 'quiet diplomacy' towards Zimbabwe. If he becomes president in 2009, this could have a significant impact on the country's foreign policy.

But, whoever is elected as South African president next year will have to focus more on solving domestic problems which, amongst many others, are poverty, unemployment, housing, crime. This seems to suggest that, regardless of who becomes the new president, foreign policy may be taking a back seat in the new administration.

### **5.3 Concluding Thoughts**

Foreign policy can be described as the range of actions taken by varying sections of the government of a particular state in its relations with other bodies similarly acting on the international stage, supposedly in order to advance the national interest. International Relations theory helps us to understand these relations. Its importance relies on the fact that social realities do not speak for themselves. In this sense, theories are abstract thoughts that help us to answer questions that we are not able to answer without appropriate reflections. In this analysis, we have seen how the two first democratically elected presidents of South Africa Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki have contributed to put back South Africa on the international arena and secured its national interest. The former was identified as an idealist and the latter has been classified as a realist. But, because of the complexity of the real world, both had to adapt their policies to international circumstances. More than often, this led to an overlap of realist and idealist thinking. This emphasises the point that while there is certainly in academic value in distinguishing between different theoretical approaches, and efforts at classification, this is not always feasible in practice, given the complexity of international relations.

Seen from this angle, the classification of Mandela and Mbeki as idealist and realist, respectively, appears less important because, though their objectives remained consistent, the conditions in which they had to realise them were in perpetual change. Mandela, for his part, came to power as the country needed to re-connect itself with the international community. Mbeki needed to find solutions to domestic issues. With the world in constant flux, and the challenges facing governments becoming increasingly complex, only time will tell whether the next South African president will be able to balance the dual demands of domestic and global demands, and which theoretical approach will be useful to explain his foreign policy-decisions.

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